

1993

## Arts and Humanities: Background (1975-1995): Report 06

The National Cultural Alliance

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES TO AMERICAN SOCIETY

A Nationwide Survey of the American Public Commissioned by:

THE NATIONAL CULTURAL ALLIANCE

Conducted by:

RESEARCH & FORECASTS, INC.  
301 East 57th St.  
New York, NY 10022

February, 1993

## Summary of Key Findings

The American public readily recognizes and acknowledges the myriad of benefits of the Arts and Humanities to a free society. They strongly believe the Arts and Humanities are an inseparable, integral part of society and help improve the quality of life. They also view the Arts and Humanities as a cornerstone of a truly, democratic and tolerant Republic. It may be said that the Arts and Humanities help to bring communities together.

The study shows that Americans participate in the Arts and Humanities not only for enjoyment, but also as a means of self-expression and personal growth.

At the same time, although many people understand these benefits, they do not personally feel that the Arts and Humanities play an important part of their daily lives.

There is a sizable portion (about 50-60%) of the population who currently believe the Arts and Humanities play only a minor role in their lives. Since time and money are the biggest obstacles to this group's involvement with the Arts and Humanities, participation is likely to increase as its members become more aware of local, low cost, and easily accessible activities. Increased awareness that Arts and Humanities experiences are even available at home in a broad range of activities as easy as reading a book, watching PBS or playing a musical instrument can also influence participation.

This study is based on 1059 telephone interviews with adult Americans 18 years of age and older, throughout the United States. Slightly over half of the respondents (52%) are women, slightly under half (48%) are men. Interviews took place between October 14 and 29, 1992. The data were weighted to match the demographics of the total adult American population. The margin of error at the 95% confidence level for the total sample is +/- 3%.

Below are the key study findings:

- o A broad cross-section of the American public recognizes the benefits and the relevance of the Arts and Humanities. Simply put, the Arts and Humanities enhance the quality of life to both individuals and society as a whole. This was seen by the high levels of agreement with the following statements:

"The Arts and Humanities contribute to the economic health and well-being of society." (81% Agree)

"The Arts and Humanities make my own local community a better place to live." (80% Agree)

"The Arts and Humanities provide an anchor or reference point in a world of turmoil." (77% Agree)

"The Arts and Humanities help provide a sense of roots and stability in children." (86% Agree)

Only 19% of the respondents agreed with the statement that "the Arts and Humanities are not essential to a healthy American society".

- o The Arts and Humanities also help bring together people of different ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds, fostering a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect. Over nine out of ten Americans agree that the Arts and Humanities "help people learn about those of different cultural and ethnic groups" (91% Agree).

A vast majority of Americans also believe the Arts and Humanities "help me in understanding and appreciating different types of peoples and cultures" (87% Agree) and "help bring people together" (87% Agree).

Ninety-three percent (93%) agree that the Arts and Humanities "teach children about different cultural or ethnic groups".

- o The Arts and Humanities represent freedom that is critical to a democratic society. Most (91%) agree that "the Arts and Humanities represent freedom of expression". Nearly as many (83%) agree with the statement that "the Arts and Humanities provide a form of expression that is essential to a democratic society".

- o The need to expose children to the Arts and Humanities is considered important by virtually every respondent. The benefits include the following:

"Provide children with a means of self-expression" (95% Agree)

"Having fun" (94% Agree)

"Provide a sense of accomplishment" (92% Agree)

"Creates an opportunity to spend time with other children and make friends" (92% Agree)

"Help in their overall intellectual development." (92% Agree)

- o Many Americans feel there is also an inner need to experience many of the activities associated with the Arts and Humanities.

"People have an in-born need to experience the Arts and Humanities" (78% Agree).

"Being able to enjoy the Arts and Humanities is a necessity rather than a luxury" (59% Agree).

- o There is a widespread belief that the Arts and Humanities also help people understand themselves and provide insight into their lives. Over four out of five adult Americans said that the Arts and Humanities:

"Provide an outlet for individual views" (89% Yes)

"Provide insight into oneself and others" (85% Yes)

"Help us to achieve self-fulfillment" (84% Yes)

"Satisfy peoples' needs to experience beauty" (83% Yes)

- o Participation in the Arts and Humanities is not perceived as an elitist activity or reserved only for the wealthy. Few Americans agree that "the Arts and Humanities are only for the wealthy" (12%), and "I don't have enough education to participate in the Arts and Humanities" (17%).

- o The issue of the public's interest in the Arts and Humanities is a complex one. Interest level can be affected by definition, perspective or context. Therefore, we first asked people of their interest without providing a definition of the Arts and Humanities, then asked them in their own words to define the Arts and Humanities, then later provided (see P. 5) a definition so all respondents were working with the same concepts.

The American public shows a strong interest in the Arts and Humanities. Five percent (5%) are "extremely" interested and 18% are "very" interested. An additional 40% are "somewhat" interested. These responses were volunteered without the benefit of a definition of both the Arts and Humanities.

#### **Interest in the Arts and Humanities**

	<u>Total</u>
Extremely interested	5%
Very interested	18
Somewhat interested	40
Not too interested	23
Not at all interested	11
Don't know	4

Women (27%) are more likely to be "very interested" than men (19%). Additionally, people with more education and income are generally more interested in the Arts and Humanities than those with less income and education. Thirty percent (30%) of the respondents with annual incomes over \$50,000 are very interested in the Arts and Humanities compared to only 20% who earn less than that amount. Slightly over one-third (34%) who attended college are very interested in the Arts and Humanities compared to only 15% of those who never attended college.

People in rural areas are less interested than those in urban areas or suburbs.

- o People have a much easier time defining the Arts than the Humanities. Most people define the Arts as a type of art such as a painting, picture, statue, etc. (61%), music-related (27%) or theatre (26%).

On the other hand, almost one-third (31%) were unable to provide a definition of the Humanities. The people that did offer a definition associate the Humanities with social relations (29%) and social service (14%). A few defined the Humanities as college classes (9%), literature (6%), and culture (6%). The implication is that people can define the Arts more readily than the Humanities and suggests the Humanities need to do a better job communicating concisely what it is all about.

- o However, when one type of definition of the Arts and Humanities is provided--that is "The Arts and Humanities are considered to include visual arts, such as painting and sculpture; literature; the performing arts of theatre, dance and music; and philosophy, history, and languages"--almost one-third (31%) view the Arts and Humanities as playing a "major" role in their lives.

Still over half (57%) of the Americans surveyed feel the Arts and Humanities play a "minor" role in their lives.

**Role of the Arts and Humanities in Peoples Lives**  
(Definition Provided)

	<u>Total</u> (1059)
	%
Major role	31
Minor role	57
No role at all	11
Don't know	1

As in the case of interest in the Arts and Humanities, women (35%) are more likely to view the Arts and Humanities as playing a "major" role in their lives than men (27%). Additionally, respondents with more education (43% with some college or more) feel the Arts and Humanities play a major role than those with a High School or less education (22%). Blacks (44%) are more likely to view the Arts and Humanities as being a major part of their lives than Whites (29%) and Hispanics (27%).

Additionally, people 55 years of age and under (34%) are more likely to feel the Arts and Humanities play a major role in their lives than those over 55 years of age (24%). People who live in rural areas are less likely to say the Arts and Humanities play a major role in their lives than people who live in cities, suburbs and towns.

What is interesting, however, are the people who say the Arts and Humanities play a "minor" role in their lives. This group is evenly divided between men and women, contains people of all age groups, people who live in all types of communities and most geographic areas. They are also more likely to have less education.

- o Without asking about money or for specific measures of support, the respondents were asked how supportive they generally were of the Arts and Humanities. The results indicate strong support for the Arts and Humanities among the American people.

**Support for the Arts and Humanities**

	<u>Total</u> (1059) %
Very supportive	30
Somewhat supportive	50
Not very supportive	10
Not at all supportive	6
Don't know	4

Thirty percent (30%) of the respondents feel that they are "very supportive" of the Arts and Humanities and an additional 50% feel they are "somewhat supportive". People 18 to 34 years of age (37%) are more likely to be "very supportive" than people 35 years of age or more (26%). Additionally, respondents with more education are more likely to be "very supportive" than those with less education (43% vs. 21%).

However, when specifically asked about contributing money to the Arts and Humanities in the past year, strong support was seen when (41%) reported that someone in their immediate household contributed money to the Arts and Humanities over the past year.

A larger percentage of Hispanics (51%) reported financial donations to the Arts and Humanities in the past year than Whites (42%) and Blacks (27%).

- o While most of the data is positive regarding the value of the Arts and Humanities in our society and to the lives of most Americans, there is a sizable group which does not perceive the Arts and Humanities as important to their lives. Forty-one percent (41%) agree with the statement that "the Arts and Humanities have little to do with my daily life".

Additionally, 46% agree that "compared to other concerns in today's society, the Arts and Humanities have a low priority for me".

- o Over half (54%) of the respondents feel there are further obstacles which prevent them from experiencing the Arts and Humanities. The most frequently mentioned obstacles are:

Lack of time	48%
Financial concerns	27%
Activities are not in the area/too far away	20
Age/health reasons	15%

As people realize that many Arts and Humanities activities are available through television, the home computer or the local community and library, the obstacle of location or lack of local activities should be reduced.

It is interesting to note that even among people who have high interest in the Arts and Humanities and view the Arts and Humanities as playing a major role in their lives, they cite even more obstacles than those who are less interested.

Family responsibilities and concerns may further impact participation in the Arts and Humanities. The respondents that cite "lack of time" as an obstacle, are more likely to have small children.

Lack of time and money is underscored by the fact that slightly over half (51%) of the respondents agree that "they do not have enough disposable income to participate in the Arts and Humanities", and that over one-third (37%) agree that "they are too occupied with economic matters to pay much attention to the Arts and Humanities".



o Although most Americans understand the many benefits to free speech associated with the Arts and Humanities, a sizable minority of Americans find some of today's art objectionable. Over a third (38%) of those surveyed agree that "too much art and literature these days is suggestive or indecent". People aged 55 and over and people with less education are most likely to agree with the above statement. Mainstream Protestants (43%) are more likely to agree with the above statement than Catholics (34%) or Born-Again Christians (37%).

o In spite of obstacles and objections to some content, most people feel that public funding of the Arts and Humanities is important and should continue. This support makes possible bringing the Arts and Humanities closer to more people and helps prevent the Arts and Humanities being only for the elite.

A solid majority (59%) agree with the statement that "without public support, the Arts and Humanities would be available only to the wealthy." An even larger majority (73%) agree that "in spite of economic hardship, public and private support of the Arts and Humanities should not be curtailed."

o Additional findings in the survey cite high levels of participation in Arts and Humanities activities. The most popular activities in the past year were: watching a movie (94%), discussing philosophy, politics, history or religion with friends or family (89%), reading for pleasure (87%), and watching programs on PBS (79%).

Involvement is lower in a number of Arts and Humanities activities that require more effort and greater cost. For example, during the past year, almost half (47%) of the respondents attended a play or concert, ballet or opera, and 46% visited a museum or art gallery.

A surprisingly high 31% of the American population said that they have written poetry, fiction or something else for pleasure in the past year, and 16% participated in a play or musical activity.

Participation in a number of Arts and Humanities activities varied by race. Blacks tend to be more likely to watch a movie (97%), participate in a play or musical activity (23%) and read for pleasure (34%).

Hispanics tend to discuss politics, history, philosophy or religion (94%), attend a play, or concert, ballet or opera (54%), and visit a museum or art gallery (50%).

o People are more likely to feel that television enhances the enjoyment of the Arts and Humanities. Forty-five percent (45%) feel that it increases enjoyment, while 29% feel that it decreases peoples' enjoyment or robs them of time that

could be put to better use. Thirteen percent (13%) said television has no effect.

Surprisingly, the more interest the respondents have in the Arts and Humanities, the more likely they are to believe that television enhances their enjoyment.

Those who view television as enhancing the Arts and Humanities feel that it exposes people to things they would not ordinarily see (27%), PBS is good and you can learn a lot from it (22%), television is broadly accessible (17%) and that more channels results in a variety of programs (15%).

People who do not view commercial television favorably feel that it keeps people at home (33%), is mindless entertainment (20%) and that watching television is easier than pursuing the Arts (17%).

- o Adult Americans rate the following groups highest in doing the best job fostering an appreciation of the Arts and Humanities in America:

	<u>% Excellent</u>
Arts and Humanities organizations	20
Individual artists	19
Colleges and Universities	18
Scholars	11
Elementary and High Schools	10
Parents	8
The media	5
Corporations	4
Local Government	3
Federal Government	3

Few respondents feel that Elementary and High Schools (10%) and Parents (8%) do an excellent job promoting the Arts and Humanities. The Federal government (3% Excellent) and Local Government (3% Excellent) are considered to be doing the poorest job.

## Conclusions and Observations

The study clearly identified three key groups of Americans regarding their involvement and participation in the Arts and Humanities.

- 1. High Involvement/Very Supportive:** This group accounts for 20-30% of the population. They participate in more activities and view the Arts and Humanities as playing a "major" role in their lives. While they are more likely to support the Arts and Humanities and contribute money, they are also more likely to cite obstacles in their life that prevent increased participation. This group tends to be female, better educated and earn more money.
- 2. Moderate Interest and Involvement:** This group accounts for slightly greater than half of the population. They participate in fewer activities than the High Involvement group. The biggest obstacle to increasing their participation is their perceived lack of time. They would like to increase their involvement, but cannot right now because of life's pressures. This moderate interest group is more likely to have children and be between the ages of 35 and 55.
- 3. Limited Interest:-** This group has virtually no interest in the Arts and Humanities and probably cannot be persuaded to increase that involvement. They account for about 10-20% of the population. These people are more likely to have less education, have lower incomes, be reclusive and participate in fewer Arts and Humanities activities.

The American public understands and acknowledges the relevance and the positive impact of the Arts and Humanities. They are good for the society and satisfying to the individual. They bring people together and help to improve the quality and appreciation of life.

However, regardless of all the benefits they see, many Americans have not incorporated the Arts and Humanities into their daily lives. They often cite the obstacles of lack of time, money and accessibility of activities that prevent greater participation. These obstacles can be diminished by a number of actions. They include a broadening of the understanding that the Arts and Humanities include every day activities like playing a musical instrument, reading, and discussing history or politics. It can also include highlighting select television programs and free local community events.

The study also refutes a number of commonly held myths about the Arts and Humanities. These include:

- The Arts and Humanities are elitist activities.
- The Arts and Humanities are not accessible to most people.
- The Arts and Humanities are only leisure-time activities.
- The Arts and Humanities are only for the wealthy.

The results also show the high value Blacks and Hispanics place on the Arts and Humanities. This is seen through strong levels of participation in certain activities and high ratings of support and importance in their daily lives. Arts and Humanities are flourishing in these communities.

Through participation in the Arts and Humanities, people are encouraged to learn more about and understand people of different races and cultures. The Arts and Humanities can help both to define society and keep it together. As a result, participation in the Arts and Humanities offers a unique advantage, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of people of different cultures, beliefs and backgrounds. The Arts and Humanities may be one of the most powerful forces to help promote racial tolerance and understanding. Arts and Humanities are more than programming. They are both making and appreciating personal contacts in communities and learning about other cultures through artists and scholars whose work often embodies the spirit of those communities.

While most people see the benefits of exposing children to the Arts and Humanities, parents and schools were not perceived as strong in fostering an appreciation of the Arts and Humanities. They have the opportunity to set the example and communicate the fact that personal involvement in the Arts and Humanities can be lifelong, fun and life-enhancing. They have a responsibility to ensure that our children experience the Arts and Humanities at all levels of their educational lives.

Television's positive role in fostering the Arts and Humanities also needs to be recognized and stressed. The American public must be made even more aware of the Arts and Humanities programs on PBS and cable television.

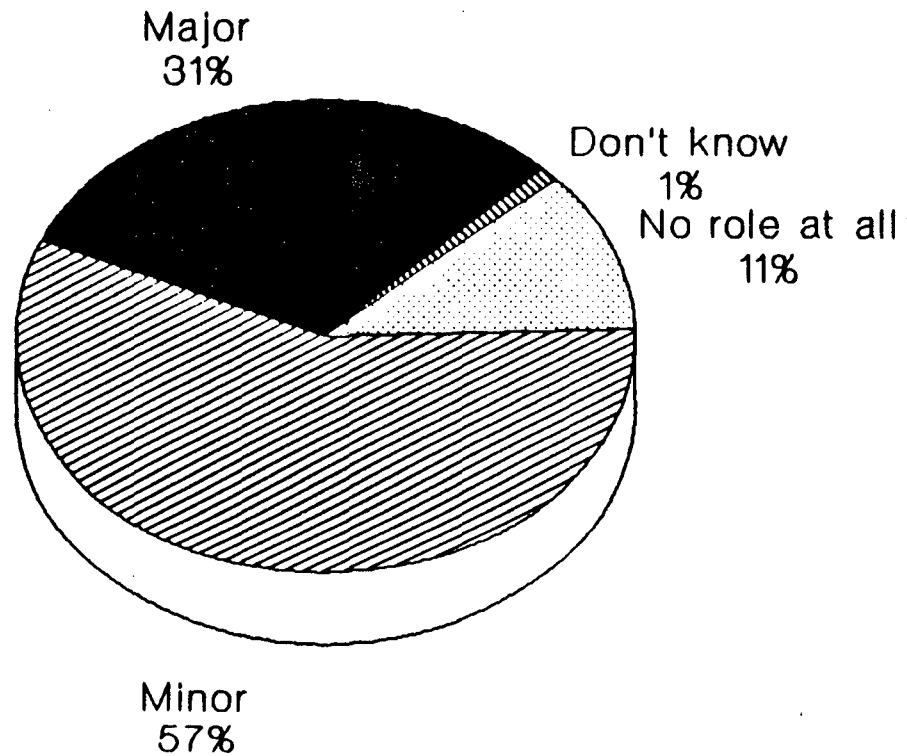
The Arts and Humanities can be experienced in local parks, lunch-box theatres, neighborhoods, libraries, one's own home, churches and synagogues etc. Local, inexpensive community activities must also be highlighted.

Government and businesses can do more to ensure that the Arts and Humanities are available to everybody. They are critical sources of support for the Arts and Humanities.

## Dimensions of the Analysis

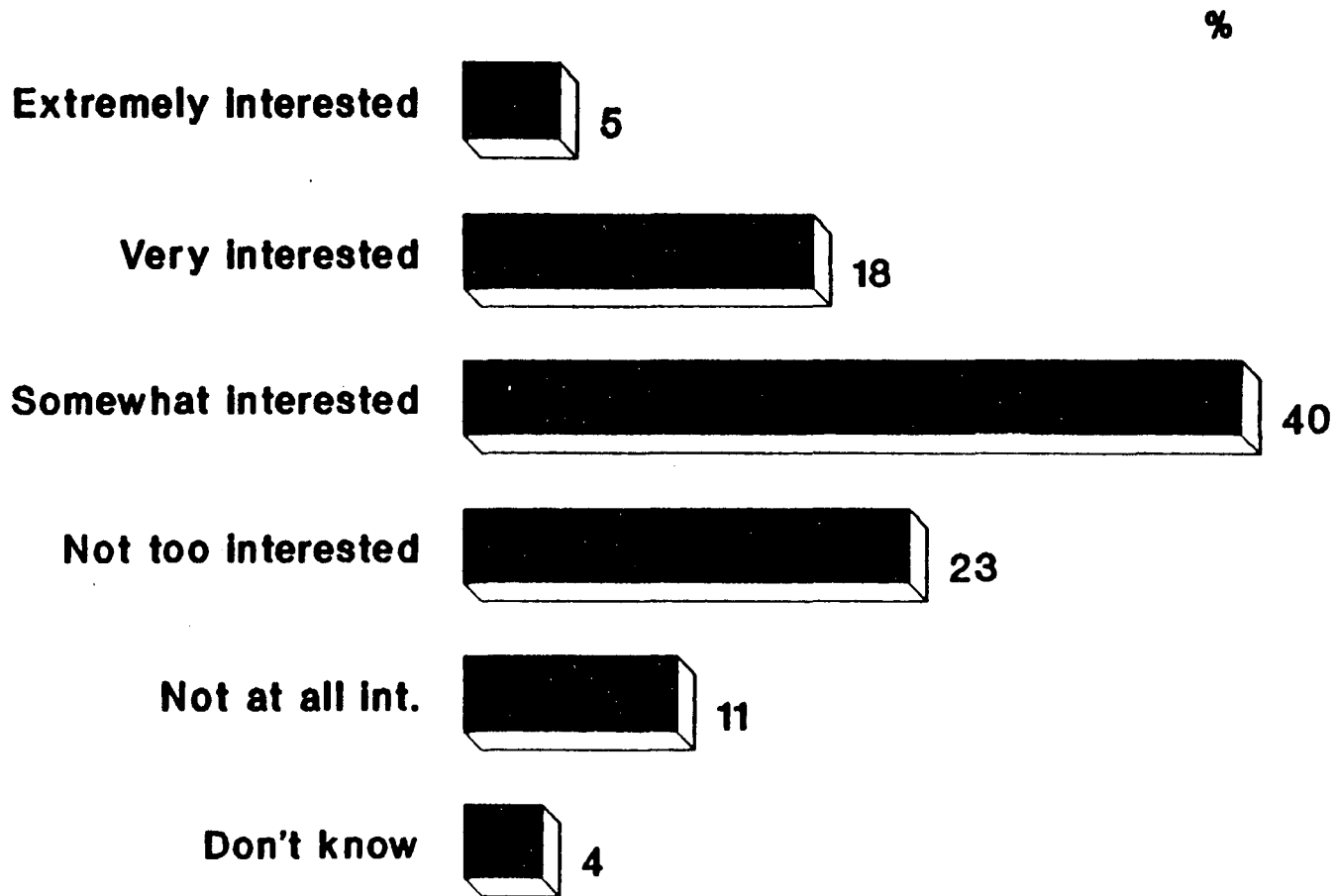
	<u>Number of Respondents</u> 1059	<u>Unweighted Percentage</u> 100%	<u>Weighted Percentage</u> 100%
<b>Total</b>			
<b><u>Gender</u></b>			
Female	554	52	52
Male	505	48	48
<b><u>Age</u></b>			
18-34	402	38	36
35-55	422	40	35
56+	229	22	28
<b><u>Race</u></b>			
White	906	86	80
Black	76	7	12
Hispanic	33	3	3
Other	37	4	4
<b><u>Community</u></b>			
City	339	33	32
Suburb	236	22	21
Town	223	21	21
Rural	253	24	25
<b><u>Income</u></b>			
Under \$30,000	377	36	42
\$30,000 - Under \$50,000	297	28	26
\$50,000+	196	19	13
No Answer	189	17	19
<b><u>Religion</u></b>			
Protestant	500	47	48
Catholic	279	26	26
Born Again Christian	94	9	10
Jew	16	2	1
Other Response	170	17	15
<b><u>Geography</u></b>			
East	280	26	20
Midwest	307	29	25
South	307	29	34
West	165	16	21
<b><u>Education</u></b>			
High School or Less	400	38	57
Some College or More	657	62	43

# ROLE ARTS AND HUMANITIES PLAY IN OUR LIVES (N=1,059)



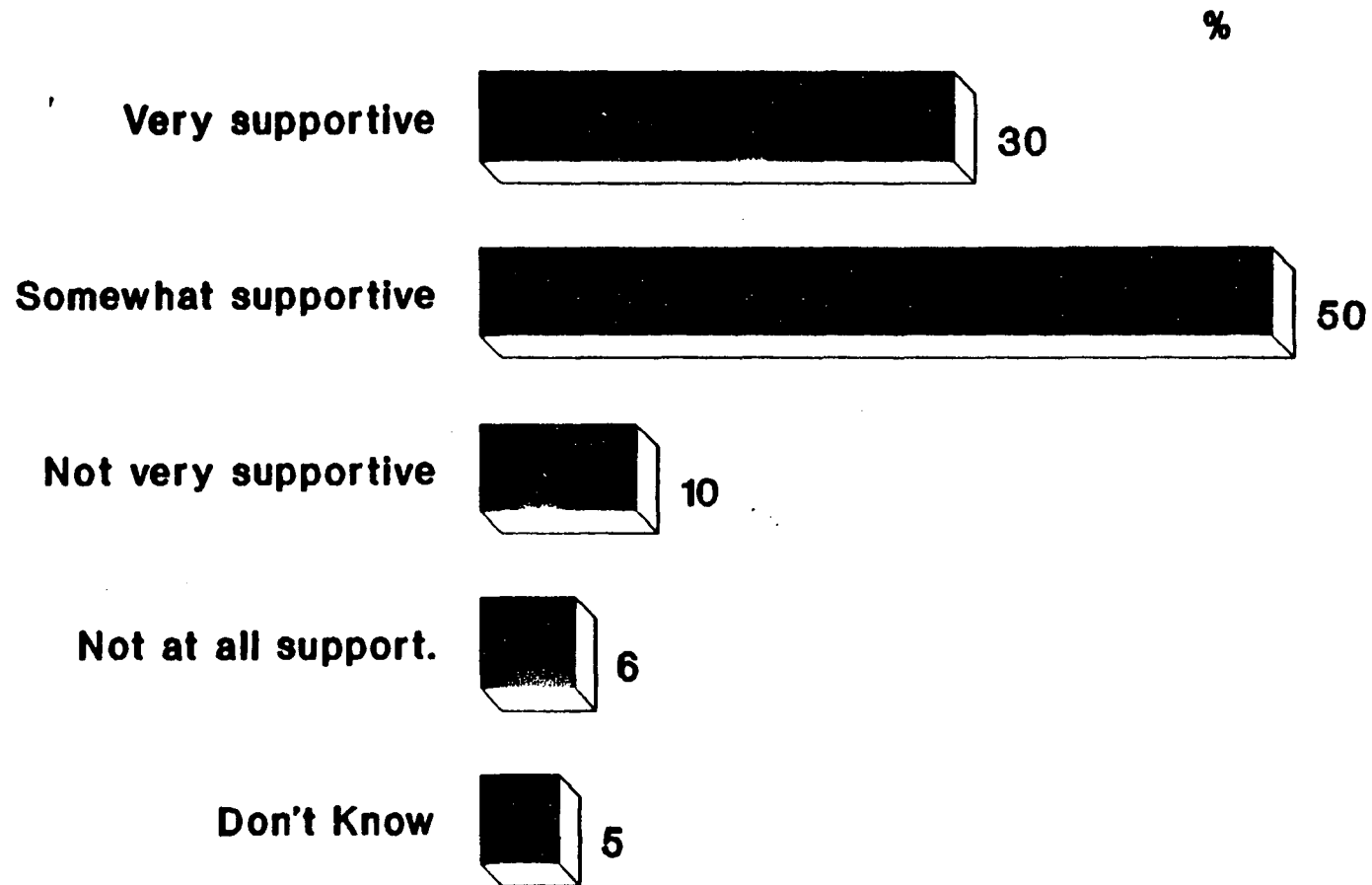
Q.4a

# INTEREST IN ARTS AND HUMANITIES (N=1,059)



Q.1a

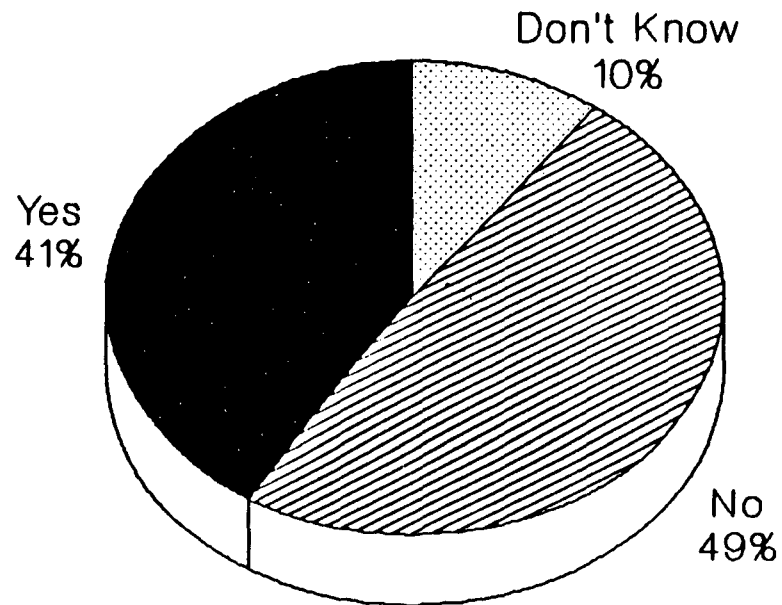
# SUPPORT FOR ARTS AND HUMANITIES (N=1,059)



Q.13a

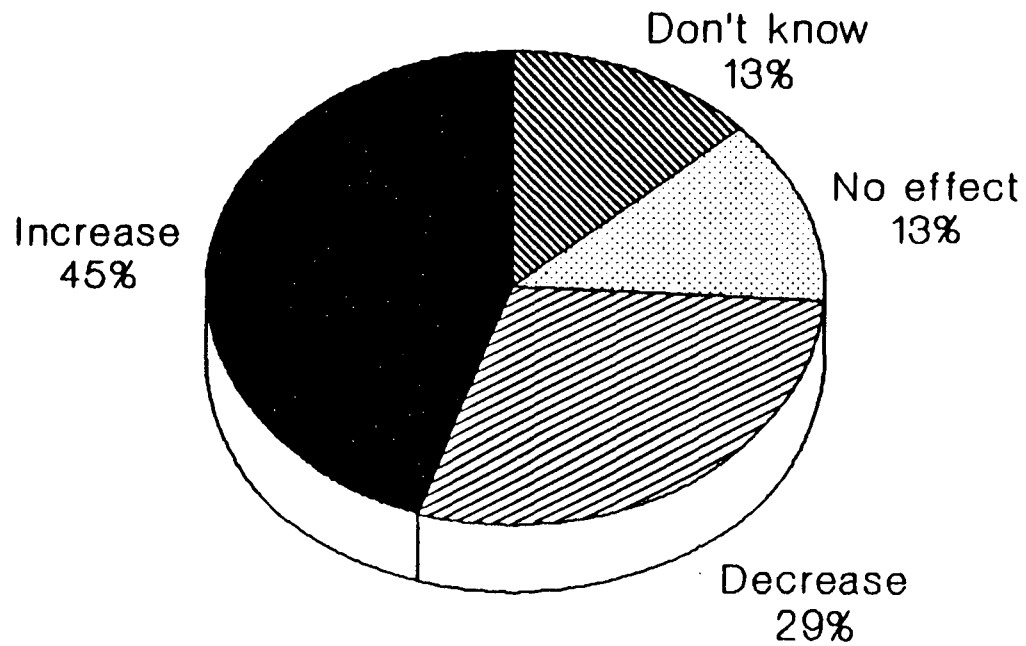


**WHETHER CONTRIBUTED MONEY TO THE  
ARTS AND HUMANTIES IN LAST YEAR  
(N=1,059)**



**Q.18**

**IMPACT OF TELEVISION ON ENJOYMENT  
OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES  
(N=1,059)**



Q.15a

# GROUPS WHO DO THE BEST JOB OF FOSTERING APPRECIATION OF THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES (N = 1,059)

