

Study finds bipartisan US support for parks and recreation services

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Are local park and recreation services worth the national average of \$70 per household member?



Credit: Dennis Maney

In the midst of the 2016 presidential election season, headlines often tell the story of a polarized political climate in America. However, a recent national survey conducted by Penn State researchers found overwhelming bipartisan support for parks and recreation.

That 2015 study found that Americans who described themselves as Republicans, Democrats and independents were nearly identical in their

use of park and recreation services, their opinions of the benefits provided by these services, and their willingness to pay for them.

"In an age of political divisiveness, agreement or consensus on any issue can be difficult to find," said Andrew Mowen, associate professor of recreation, park, and tourism management and lead investigator. "Yet, our findings speak to the important place that local parks occupy in the minds of Americans, regardless of their political affiliation."

[Penn State researchers studied Americans' use and perceptions of local park and recreation services as a follow up to an earlier 1991 Penn State study.](#) Researchers found that more than 80 percent of Americans believed they and their communities benefited from parks and recreation.

That support turned out to also be bipartisan.

Perhaps one of researchers' most surprising findings is that 78 percent of Republicans, 80 percent of Democrats, and 80 percent of independents said these services were worth the average of \$70 per household member paid in local taxes to support these services.

"Republicans want small government and low taxes, the narrative goes, and Democrats want more government services and will accept higher taxes," said Geoffrey Godbey, lead investigator from the 1991 study and collaborator on the 2015 study and professor emeritus at Penn State.

"Knowing this, the Penn State research team expected differences between Republicans and Democrats in their willingness to pay taxes for local park and recreation services. As it turned out, Republicans, Democrats and independents expressed similar levels of support for local taxes spent on this governmental service."

Researchers also found that 71 percent of Republicans, 69 percent of

Democrats, and 73 percent of independents reported using local parks, playgrounds and open space in their community.

"Despite differing political views, the American public seems united in both their appreciation and use of local park and recreation services," said Mowen. "This study demonstrates widespread support for local park and recreation services across the political spectrum."

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) commissioned Penn State to conduct both the 1991 and the 2015 studies. Researchers completed their 2015 report in January. The full report, along with an executive summary, is [publicly available on the NRPA website](#).

More information: Americans' Broad-Based Support for Local Recreation and Park Services: www.nrpa.org/americans-support-parks/

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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