

- against employers in this community who hire illegal immigrants.” That view was held by 68% in 2009.
- Last year (in 2010), 61% said the local police should take an active role in identifying undocumented immigrants and 34% thought that responsibility should be left mainly to the federal authorities. Today, the figures are reversed: Only 44% in this year’s survey called on HPD to take a more active role in immigration enforcement and 50% now believed that such enforcement should be left mainly to the federal authorities.
 - The percent of area residents who support “granting illegal immigrants a path to legal citizenship if they speak English and have no criminal record” declined from 68% in 2007 to 59% in 2010, but then increased to 67% in this year’s survey.
 - On the other hand, when asked about legal immigration, only 54% in 2011 said “the increasing ethnic diversity in Houston brought about by immigration” is a “good thing” for the city, down significantly from 67% in 2005 and 61% in 2009.
 - In this year’s survey, 41% thought the increasing immigration into this country today “mostly strengthens American culture,” and 50% believed that it “mostly threatens American culture.” In 2005, 57% believed that immigration strengthens American culture, as did 49% in 2009.

G. As Houston’s burgeoning ethnic diversity continues to grow, there are clear and consistent differences by age among Anglos in their general acceptance of the new demographic realities and in their support for gay rights.

- Asked how they would feel if a close relative wanted to marry a non-Anglo, just 8% of Anglo respondents in the 2011 survey said they would disapprove, down from 13% in 2002 and 23% in 1995. Among Anglo respondents today who are under the age of 30, 93% said they would approve, compared to 69% of those aged 60 or older.

- Across the years, the surveys have asked about the morality of abortion and homosexuality. The proportion for whom abortion is “morally acceptable” or who say, “it depends on the circumstances,” has remained unchanged — at 41% in 2001 and 41% in 2011. At the same time, the numbers who consider homosexuality to be “morally acceptable” grew from 45% in 2001 to 60% in this year’s survey. In 2011, 44% agreed that “Marriages between homosexuals should be given the same legal status as heterosexual marriages,” up from 37% in 2001 and 32% in 2007.
- On virtually all the relevant items, support for gay rights is considerably stronger among the younger respondents, but there is little or no relationship between age and any of the questions in the surveys asking about abortion attitudes.

General conclusions: The new pro-growth agenda

- To prosper in the high-technology, knowledge-based, global economy, this city (and nation) will need to nurture a far more educated workforce and fashion policies that can reduce the growing inequalities and prevent the rise of a new urban underclass.
- To attract the most innovative companies and talented individuals, Houston will need to grow into a more environmentally and aesthetically appealing urban destination, and develop the research centers that will fuel the engines of growth in the new economy.
- If this region is to flourish in the twenty-first century, it will need to develop into a much more unified and inclusive multiethnic society, one in which equality of opportunity is truly made available to all area residents and all of its communities are empowered to participate as full partners in shaping the Houston future.

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The Kinder Houston Area Survey — 2011

From the 30th Year of Houston Surveys

April 2011

Through three decades of systematic research, the annual **Kinder Houston Area Survey** has measured this region’s remarkable economic and demographic transformations and recorded the way area residents are responding to them. No other metropolitan area in America has been the focus of a research program of this scope and none more clearly exemplifies the trends that are rapidly refashioning the social and political landscape of urban America.

In February 2010, Rice University officially launched the Institute for Urban Research, with Professors Stephen Klineberg and Michael Emerson serving as co-directors. On Nov. 17, 2010, Houston philanthropists Rich and Nancy Kinder announced a \$15 million gift to Rice University to build endowment support for expanded research in Houston and other major cities around the world. In their honor, the institute has been renamed the Kinder Institute for Urban Research.

The mission of the Kinder Institute is to conduct scientific research, sponsor educational programs, and engage in public outreach that advances understanding of pressing urban issues and fosters the development of more humane and sustainable cities. It will establish a permanent home for the Kinder Houston Area Survey and ensure that for generations to come this research will provide continually updated and increasingly valuable information about area residents’ experiences, demographic patterns, attitudes, and beliefs.

The interviews for the 30th annual survey, reaching a scientifically selected representative sample of 750 Harris County residents — including 240 respondents contacted by cell phone — were conducted by the Hobby Center for Public Policy at the University of Houston between Feb. 17 and March 9, 2011. Analyses of the survey data across the years make it clear

Highlights from this year’s survey

- The economic outlooks among Harris County residents have shown slight improvements compared to last year, but there is little confidence that a sustained recovery is under way.
- Area residents are worried about the American future, but they are feeling better about Houston — local crime, air pollution, and traffic — and they are even more enthusiastic than in past years about the Houston area in general as a place to live.
- Houston’s burgeoning diversity, poised to continue growing rapidly in the years ahead, is creating deep ambivalence and mixed reactions. Younger Anglos are considerably more comfortable with the demographic trends and more in favor of gay rights than older Anglos.





that area residents differ significantly in their experiences and attitudes by whether they are rich or poor, black or white, immigrant or native-born, young or old, urban or suburban, male or female, religious or secular, Democrat or Republican, etc. It will be important to understand and appreciate such differences as we work together to build the Houston future.

Here, we consider the Harris County population as a whole and ask how the responses obtained in 2011 differ from those given to identical questions by previous representative samples of Houston area residents. Presented below are some of the most interesting findings:

A. Harris County residents have become somewhat more upbeat in their personal economic outlooks, but they remain pessimistic about the long-term prospects.

- The official unemployment rates in Harris County grew from 4.3% in February 2008, to 6.6% in 2009, to 8.5% in 2010 and 8.4% in 2011. Simultaneously, the proportion of respondents giving positive evaluations (ratings of “excellent” or “good”) to job opportunities in the Houston area declined from 57% in 2008 to 49% in 2009 to 38% in 2010 and remained at 38% in this year’s survey.
- The proportion of area residents who spontaneously pointed to the local economy (unemployment, poverty or the cost of living) when asked to name “the biggest problem facing people in the Houston area today” jumped from 15% in the 2008 survey to 44% in 2009 and 38% in 2010. The economy, named by 37% in this year’s survey, continues to be the predominant concern of area residents today.
- When asked about their personal situations, respondents this year were slightly more optimistic than in 2010, when economic well being reached record lows. The proportion of survey participants who said their personal circumstances had been getting *better* in the past few years dropped from 40% in 2008 to 32% in 2009 to just 20% in 2010. Today, 26% report improving conditions.
- With regard to outlooks on the personal future, the proportion who thought that they would be *better off* three or four years down the road fell from 58% in 2008 to 52% in 2009 to 48% in 2010; then back to a slightly more optimistic view of 52% in 2011.
- There was an insignificant increase, from 38% in 2010 to 41% today, in the numbers predicting that local living conditions in the next few years will be *better* than today.

B. Houston area residents perceive a more problematic national economy, where generational advance is less assured and education more important than ever before.

- The proportion of area residents who were confident that young people in America will eventually have a *higher* standard of living than today’s adult Americans dropped from 43% in 2007 to just 31% in 2011. Similarly, the number of respondents who believed that their own standard of living would eventually be *higher* than that of their parents declined precipitously from 72% in 2008 to 57% in 2010.
- When asked if they agreed with the claim that “If you work hard in this city, eventually you will succeed,” the numbers held steady at 87% in 2009 and 86% today.
- The respondents were asked in alternating years about the suggestion that “People who work hard and live by the rules are not getting a fair break these days.” In 2010, 67% agreed with that assessment, up from 57% in 2002.
- In 2011, 78% disagreed that “a high school education is enough to get a good job,” up slightly from 74% who expressed that view in 2008. In 2010, 67% agreed that “There are very few good jobs in today’s economy for people without a college education.”
- The percent who spontaneously mentioned *education* (public schools, libraries, other children’s issues) when asked to name the biggest problem facing people in the Houston area jumped from just 1.7% in 2009 and 2.0% in 2010 to 7.6% in 2011.
- The proportion of area residents who believed that the country as a whole is headed for “better times” increased from 26% in 2006 to 39% in 2009 but then declined to 35% in 2010 and 36% today. The numbers foreseeing “more difficult times” ahead dropped from 68% in 2006 to 58% in 2009 and held steady at 60% in 2011.

C. Concerns about the economy are reflected in greater support for government efforts to address the growing inequalities and in resistance to additional spending on foreign aid or global warming.

- In the 2011 survey, 72% said that most poor people in the U.S. today are poor because of “circumstances they can’t control,” up significantly from 68% in 2007 and 52% in 1999. Only 22% this year believed that people are poor in America today mostly because “they don’t work hard enough,” compared to 25% who felt that way in 2007 and to 36% in 1999.

- Back in 1996, 60% agreed that “Government is trying to do too many things that should be left to individuals and businesses,” and 36% believed instead that “Government should do more to solve our country’s problems.” In 2011, only 45% said that government is trying to do too much and 48% called for more government involvement.

- In the 2009 survey, 45% agreed and 49% disagreed with the suggestion that “Government has a responsibility to help reduce the inequalities between rich and poor in America.” In 2011, the figures were 52% in agreement and 43% who disagreed.

- At the same time, this year’s survey uncovered increasing resistance to government spending, focused primarily on foreign aid: Fully 47% of the respondents in 2011 said we were spending “too much” on “economic aid to the poor countries of the world,” up from 42% in 2009 and 32% in 2007.

- Similarly, the surveys reveal a growing resistance to addressing the challenge of climate change: 48% in 2011 said that “the high global temperatures we’ve experienced in recent years” are mainly caused by “normal climate cycles,” up from 41% in 2009 and 36% in 2007. The numbers attributing global warming to “human activities” dropped from 51% in 2007 to 43% today. In 2010, only 37% thought global warming was a “very serious” problem, compared to 51% in 2008 and 49% in 2006.

D. Despite their economic anxieties, area residents perceive an improving quality of life in the region, and they are increasingly upbeat about the Houston area as a place to live.

- The proportions who said they were “very worried” about becoming the victim of a crime dropped from 27% in 2006 and 31% in 2008 to just 20% in this year’s survey.
- The numbers who were “very concerned” about the effects of air pollution on their family’s health fell from 52% in 2005 to 49% in 2007 and to 43% in 2011.
- The percent of respondents who said that traffic in the Houston area has gotten worse during the past three years dropped steadily from 67% in 2005 to 57% today.
- Reflecting these improving assessments of the region’s quality of place, as well as the relative success of the local economy, the survey respondents’ overall satisfaction with life in the Houston area has continued to increase. Last year’s study found that the percent of area residents giving posi-

tive ratings (“excellent” or “good”) to “the Houston area in general as a place to live” grew from 75% in 2008 to 82% in 2010.

- In alternating years, respondents have been asked to compare Houston to most other metropolitan areas. In 2005, 78% thought this region was a slightly or much “better place” in which to live, in comparison with most other urban areas. The positive evaluations expanded to 83% in 2007 to 86% in 2009 and to 90% in 2011.

E. A high proportion of Harris County residents are seeking a more urban lifestyle.

- When asked in 2011 what sort of neighborhood they would prefer to live in, most of the survey respondents (52%) would choose “a single-family residential area,” but more than 45% of all Harris County residents said they would prefer instead to live in “an area with a mix of developments, including homes, shops and restaurants.”
- In the 2010 survey, respondents were asked what they would choose if they could live in any kind of housing in the Houston area: 57% said they would prefer “a single-family home with a big yard, where you would need to drive almost everywhere you want to go.” Fully 41% of all area residents called instead for “a smaller home in a more urbanized area, within walking distance of shops and workplaces.”
- The survey respondents who were living in the city were asked how interested they would be in someday moving to the suburbs, and those in the suburbs were asked about moving to the city. In 1999, the first time the questions were included, 46% of Anglo city dwellers said they were “very” or “somewhat” interested in moving to the suburbs, compared to just 28% of those in the suburbs who were interested in someday moving to the city. Interest in suburban living has declined steadily during these years, so that today the figures are essentially equal: 28% of the Anglo city dwellers in 2011 said they were at least “somewhat interested” in moving to the suburbs and 24% of those in the suburbs expressed an interest in moving to the city.

F. Area residents appear to be slightly less antagonistic to illegal immigrants, but attitudes toward immigration and ethnic diversity in general have not improved.

- In this year’s survey, 58% of Harris County residents were in favor of “imposing fines and criminal charges

