

30th annual survey shows Houstonians upbeat about city's future

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Despite economic anxiety and concern for the future of the country, most Houstonians perceive an improving quality of life locally and 90 percent believe that Houston is a better place to live than most other metropolitan areas, according to the 30th annual Kinder Houston Area Survey conducted by Rice University. The findings were released today during a luncheon hosted by the Greater Houston Partnership and Rice's Kinder Institute for Urban Research.

The survey showed that Harris County residents have become a little more upbeat in their personal economic outlooks but remain pessimistic about the long-term national prospects. While 26 percent (up from 20 percent in 2010) report improving personal financial conditions, only 31 percent (down from 43 percent in 2007) believe that young people will eventually have a higher standard of living than adult Americans today.

"Houstonians clearly feel that the bleeding has stopped, but a robust recovery is not yet on the horizon," said survey author Stephen Klineberg, co-director of the Kinder Institute. "They are worried about the American future, but they're feeling better about Houston – about local crime, air pollution and traffic – and they are even more enthusiastic than in past years about the Houston area as a place to live."

Klineberg said that as a city at the forefront of the country's demographic revolution, Houston offers a glimpse into America's future, and the survey's assessment of the city may offer important lessons for strengthening the rest of the country: create policies that moderate the

inequalities, nurture a far more educated workforce, develop cities into environmentally and aesthetically appealing destinations, and empower all members of a multiethnic society.

Though Texas is a red state traditionally wanting less government, a majority of Houstonians today (52 percent) said that government has a responsibility to help reduce the inequalities between rich and poor in America. Only 45 percent responded that way in 2009. This year 48 percent said that "government should do more to solve our country's problems," compared with 36 percent who agreed with that assertion in 1996. Seventy-two percent of the survey respondents said that most poor people in the U.S. today are poor because of circumstances they can't control, up from 68 percent in 2007 and 52 percent in 1999.

Although 86 percent agreed that "if you work hard in this city, eventually you will succeed," 67 percent also believe that "people who work hard and live by the rules are not getting a fair break these days."

In this year's survey, 78 percent disagreed with the statement "A high school education is enough to get a good job." The percent of people who spontaneously mentioned education when asked to name the biggest problem facing people in Houston jumped to 7.6 percent this year from just 1.7 percent in 2009 and 2 percent in 2010.

"There's a new awareness that this is now a high-tech, knowledge-based economy and there aren't many good jobs for people without a college education," said Klineberg, a Rice professor of sociology. "Education is more important than ever. Long gone are the days when you could get a job out of high school, work hard and make enough money until you retire. The resources of the knowledge economy are not found in factories; they are situated between the ears of the best and brightest, who can live anywhere."

Houstonians seem willing to do what it takes to attract the best and brightest. Public support for new initiatives to improve the [quality of life](#) in Houston has remained firm or grown stronger across the 30 years of the survey. Area residents support measures to enhance the city's green spaces and bayous, revitalize and preserve urban centers and improve air and water quality.

A large proportion of Harris County residents would choose a more urban lifestyle: 52 percent said they'd prefer to live in a single-family residential area, but 45 percent would opt instead for an area with a mix of developments including homes, shops and restaurants. In 2010, 41 percent said they'd prefer a smaller home in a more urbanized area within walking distance of shops and workplaces, rather than a single-family home with a big yard "where you would need to drive almost everywhere you want to go."

"Houston is where much of the American story is being written," Klineberg said. "It's here that we're seeing the patterns that the rest of the country will experience – from the growing interest in walkable urbanism to the demographic revolution. Houston is where the American future is going to be worked out."

The Kinder Houston Area Survey showed that Houstonians' attitudes toward the burgeoning diversity, which is poised to continue growing rapidly, are conflicted, and younger Anglos are considerably more comfortable with the demographic trends.

Asked how they would feel if a close relative of theirs wanted to marry a non-Anglo, just 8 percent of the Anglo respondents this year said they would disapprove, down from 13 percent in 2002 and 23 percent in 1995. Among the Anglo respondents under the age of 30, 93 percent said they would approve of such intermarriage, compared with 69 percent of those 60 or older. Seventy percent of Anglos under 30, but

only 35 percent in the older group, said that the increasing immigration into this country today mostly strengthens American culture. Seventy-three percent of the younger respondents, compared with 52 percent of those 60 or older, said they are in favor of granting illegal immigrants a path to legal citizenship if they speak English and have no criminal record.

"Houston is where America's four major ethnic communities – Anglos, Asians, blacks and Latinos – meet in more equal numbers than almost anywhere else in the country," Klineberg said. "The challenges and opportunities of creating a more unified and inclusive multiethnic society will be seen here first."

The 2011 Kinder [Houston Area](#) Survey was conducted by phone between Feb. 17 and March 9 and reached a scientifically representative sample of 750 Harris County residents – including 240 respondents contacted by cell phone. The Survey Research Institute of the Hobby Center for Public Policy at the University of Houston administered the survey.

Through three decades of systematic research, the survey has measured this region's economic and demographic transformations. No other metropolitan region in America has been the focus of a research program of this scope.

More information: To read "What they're saying about Rice," go to [futureowls.rice.edu/images/fut ... /Rice Brag Sheet.pdf](http://futureowls.rice.edu/images/fut.../Rice_Brag_Sheet.pdf)

Provided by Rice University

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