

HOUSTON AREA SURVEY (1982-2007): Findings from the 26th Annual Survey

[Revised, June 2007, and posted on the Web site, at: www.houstonareasurvey.org]

For more than a quarter-century, the Houston Area Survey (HAS), directed by Stephen Klineberg, Professor of Sociology at Rice University, has been tracking the region's economic and demographic transformations and recording the way area residents are responding to ongoing changes. No other city in America has been the focus of a long-term longitudinal research program of this scope. None more clearly exemplifies the trends that are radically refashioning the social and political landscape of urban America. Supported by local foundations, corporations, and individuals, the surveys have measured the changing demographic patterns, experiences, attitudes, and beliefs that have taken place over the years in interviews with 26 successive representative samples of Harris County residents. The overall purpose of this continuing project is to assess systematically the public's perspectives on current trends, and to make the survey findings readily available to civic and business leaders, to the general public, and to research scholars everywhere.

Methodology. The 656 participants in the basic 2007 Houston Area Survey were selected through the standard technique of random digit dialing, with a response rate of 38 percent and a cooperation rate of 68 percent. In each household reached by randomly generated telephone numbers, the respondent is selected randomly from all residents aged 18 or older. Using "back translation" and the reconciliation of discrepancies, the questionnaire is translated into Spanish, and bilingual interviewers are assigned to the project at all times. The interviews for this year's basic survey were conducted by the Center for Public Policy at the University of Houston between February 13 and February 27, 2007.

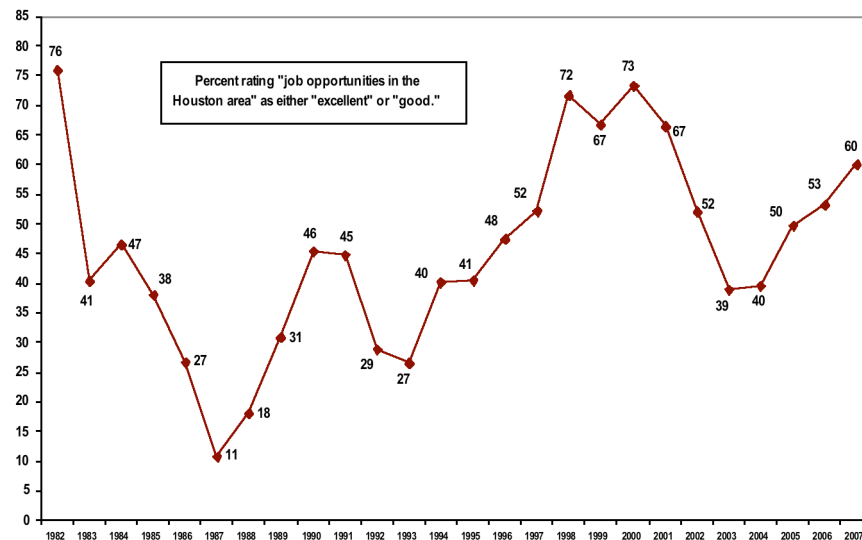
For a sample of 650, there is a 95-percent probability that the data found in the survey will be true for the entire Harris County adult population within a margin of error of plus or minus 3.5 percent. A difference from one year to the next of six percentage points or less may be due to chance variations in the samples, but when responses differ by seven or more percent, it can be concluded that they are reflecting real changes among successive samples of area residents in their responses to identical questions asked in the different years. By replicating questions from previous surveys and adding new ones to measure perspectives on current issues, the 2007 HAS has revealed important changes in area residents' attitudes and beliefs, and has sought to clarify their emerging views.

Summary findings. The responses reveal that the residents of Harris County are feeling better than they have in many years about the state of the local economy, but they are also growing more concerned about the burgeoning inequalities and more prepared to seek solutions to them. They are increasingly likely to identify crime, rather than traffic, as the biggest problem facing people in the Houston area. They are more pessimistic about ethnic relations, about immigration in general, and about the impact on Houston of the Katrina evacuees. At the same time, they are more likely than in previous years to support relatively balanced and empathetic immigration policies. They are firmly in support of initiatives to improve the local environment, even when the tradeoffs are made explicit, and they strongly approve of efforts to guide the region's growth. They are happy to be living in the Houston area, but they continue to be worried about the country's future, and they are less inclined than at any time before 2006 to support the Republican Party.

(1) Positive views of the local economy.

* ***Ratings of job opportunities:*** When asked how they would rate “job opportunities in the Houston area,” the percent saying “excellent” or “good” grew from 40% in 2004, to 50% in 2005, to 53% in 2006, and to 60% in this year’s survey (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: POSITIVE RATINGS OF JOB OPPORTUNITIES IN THE HOUSTON AREA (1982-2007)



* ***Few now see the economy as Houston’s most salient problem:*** In the open-ended question that begins the surveys — “What would you say is the biggest problem facing people in the Houston area today?” — the proportion spontaneously mentioning the economy as the biggest problem in Houston dropped from 25% in 2003, to 18% in 2004, to 15% in 2005, to 13% in 2006, and to just 10% today (see Figure 3, p. 4).

* ***Personal financial situations:*** In additional evidence of an improving economy, the percent of area residents saying that they have been doing better financially during the previous few years grew from 35% in 2006 to 44% in 2007.

(2) Growing concerns about economic inequalities and health disparities.

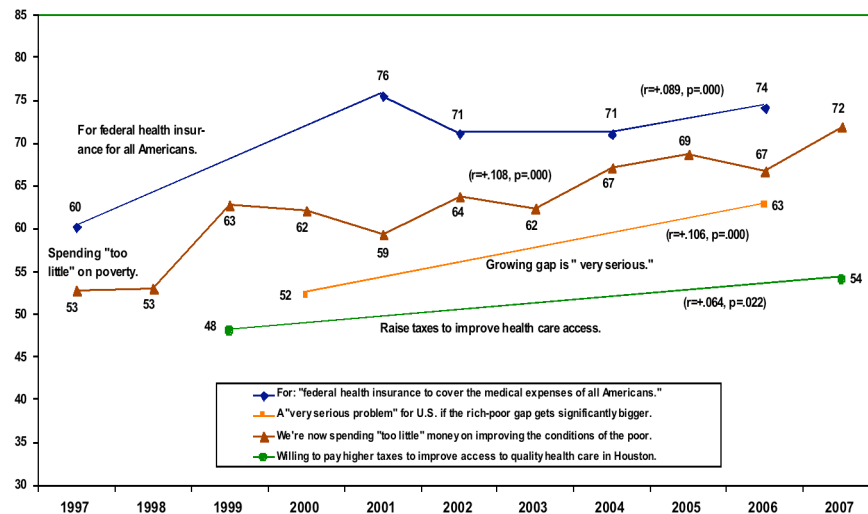
* ***Poverty concerns:*** The proportion of survey respondents saying that we are now spending “too little” nationally on “improving the conditions of the poor” grew from 59% in 2001, to 62% in 2003, to 67% in 2006, and to a whopping 72% in 2007. This is the highest number saying “too little” is being spent on poverty programs that the surveys have ever recorded in all 26 years of asking this question (Figure 2).

* ***The minimum wage:*** In the 2006 survey, when asked their views about “raising the minimum wage, if it meant that you would generally have to pay more for the things you buy,” the percentage of area residents who were in favor, even if the goods they purchase would cost them more, was 72%, with just 21% opposed.

* ***The income gaps:*** Respondents in 2006 were also asked: “How serious a problem would it be for the country if the gap between rich and poor gets significantly bigger

than it is today?” In 2000, 52% said that an expanding income gap would be a “very serious problem” for America. By 2006, that figure had grown to 63%.

FIGURE 2: CONCERNS ABOUT HEALTH CARE, POVERTY, AND INEQUALITY (1997-2007)



* **Access to health care:** As indicated in Figure 2, the percent of respondents who said they were in favor of “federal health insurance to cover the medical expenses of all Americans” grew from 60% in 1997, to 71% in 2002, and to 74% in 2006. Similarly, area residents were asked in 1999 and again in 2007 whether they would be willing to pay higher taxes in order to improve access to quality health care in the Houston area, or whether they would be opposed to increasing taxes for that purpose. The proportion saying they would personally be willing to pay higher taxes to improve health care access grew from 48% in 1999 to 54% in 2007.

(3) Perspectives on crime, terrorism, and the death penalty.

* **Crime dominates perceptions of Houston’s biggest problem:** When asked to identify the single biggest problem in the Houston area today, the number of area residents who mentioned crime or safety concerns jumped from 13% in 2005 to 31% in 2006. In the 2007 survey, the numbers grew further, to 38%, with just 25% now mentioning traffic and 10% the economy (Figure 3, below). The percent naming traffic as the biggest problem in Houston dropped from 48% in 2004 to 25% in 2007. Note, however, that when asked directly about traffic congestion, fully 67% in this year’s survey (only slightly lower and not significantly different from the 2003 or 2005 numbers) said that traffic in the Houston area has been getting worse in the past three years (see Figure 16, p. 13).

* **No change in personal fears:** Despite the recent increase in the numbers mentioning crime as Houston’s biggest problem, when respondents were asked directly, “How worried are you personally that you or a member of your family will become the victim of a crime?” — the proportion saying they were “very worried” was unchanged, at 26% in 2005 and 27% in both 2006 and 2007 (Figure 4).

* *In sum, crime is viewed as a problem in Houston, but not (yet) a compelling personal concern:* In 1995, at the height of crime fears in the region, Figure 4 shows that 41% of area residents said they were “very worried” about being the victim of a crime, compared to just 27% today. The data seem to reflect, not a fear about personal safety, but the perception, gleaned from the media and from worries about the Katrina evacuees (see pp. 9-10), that crime has once again become a serious problem for the region. The unease expressed in these concerns may well be associated with the survey findings regarding the respondents’ heightened fears of a terrorist attack and with their changing attitudes toward capital punishment.

FIGURE 3: “WHAT IS THE BIGGEST PROBLEM IN THE HOUSTON AREA TODAY?” (1982-2007)

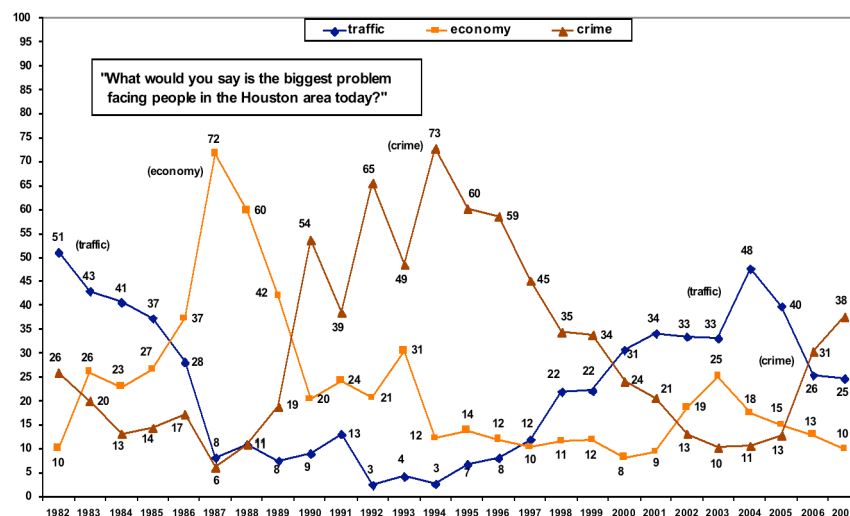
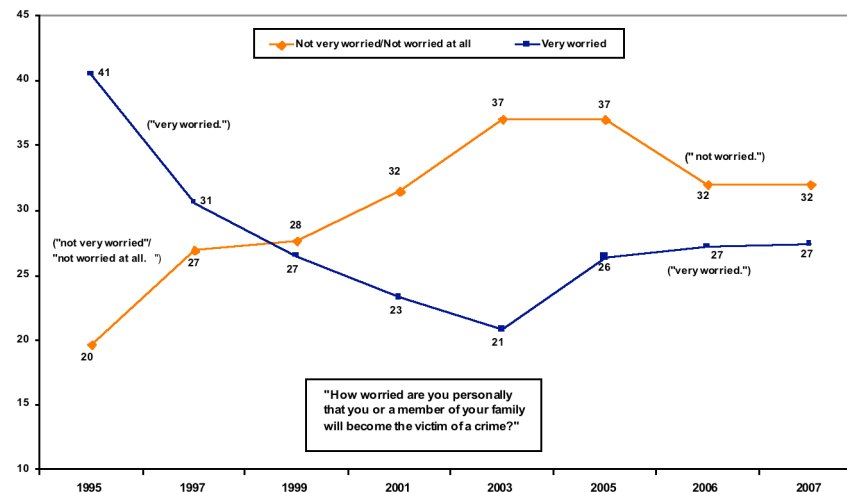


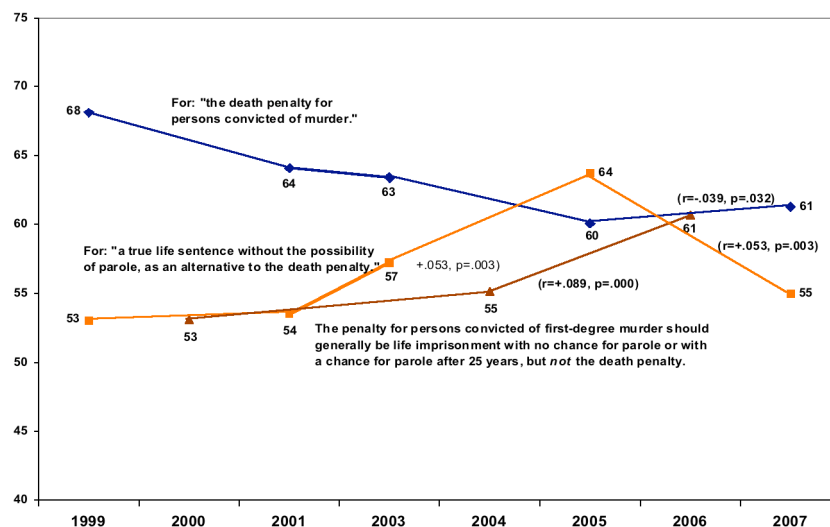
FIGURE 4: “HOW WORRIED ARE YOU THAT YOU OR A FAMILY MEMBER WILL BECOME THE VICTIM OF A CRIME?” (1995-2007)



* **A terrorist attack:** Along with mounting concerns about crime in general, the fear of terrorism is also on the rise. When asked how likely they thought it was that “there will be a major terrorist attack on Houston in the next ten years,” 71% in this year’s survey, up significantly from 63% in 2005, said they believed it was either “very likely” (25%) or “somewhat likely” (47%). Only 23%, compared to 31% in 2005, thought that a terrorist attack was “not very likely” or “not likely at all.”

* **The death penalty:** In addition, the heightened concerns about crime and terrorism may have played a role in halting the continuing decline the surveys have found in support for capital punishment. The proportion who were in favor of “the death penalty for persons convicted of murder” dropped from 79% in 1993, to 68% in 1999, to 63% in 2003, to 60% in 2005. The number was unchanged, at 61%, in this year’s survey. Support for an alternative to the death penalty for persons convicted of first-degree murder rose from 53% in 1999 to 61% in 2006. The preference for life imprisonment without the possibility of parole instead of the death penalty grew from 53% in 1999 to 64% in 2005, and then dropped to 55% in 2007 (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5: SUPPORT FOR ALTERNATIVES TO THE DEATH PENALTY (1999-2007)

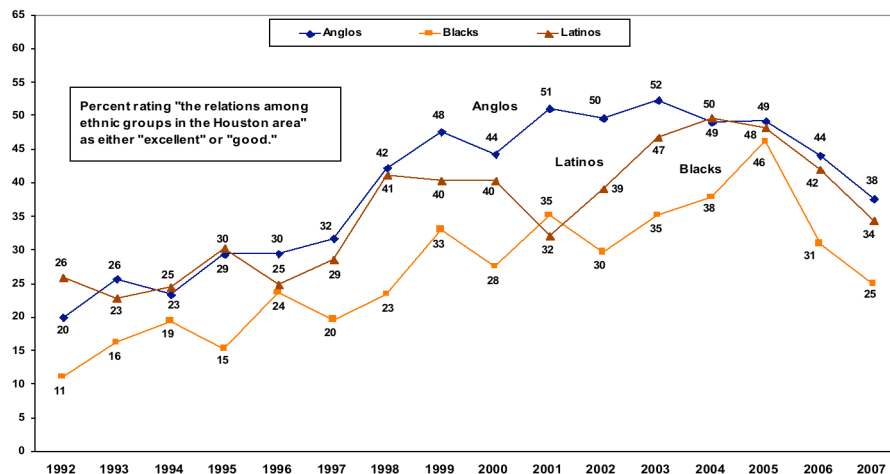


(4) Assessments of ethnic diversity, the new immigration, and the Katrina evacuees.

* **A reversal in the growing optimism about ethnic relations:** In every year since 1992, the survey respondents were asked to rate “the relations among ethnic groups in the Houston area.” Through 2005, the percent giving positive ratings increased consistently in all three of Houston’s largest ethnic communities. Anglos were generally more optimistic and blacks were more pessimistic, but the positive evaluations grew across the board — from 20% to 49% among Anglos, from 26% to 48% among Latinos, and from 11% to 47% among African Americans (Figure 6).

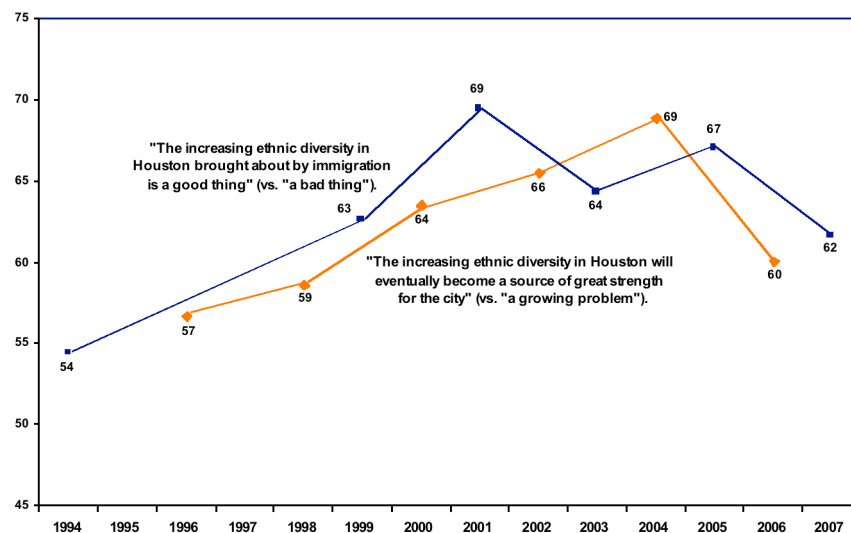
- Then, in 2006 and 2007, the proportion giving positive ratings declined decisively — among Anglos, from 49% in 2005, to 44% in 2006, and to 38% in 2007; among Latinos, from 48%, to 42%, to 34%; and among African Americans, from 47%, to 31%, to just 26% in this year’s survey.

FIGURE 6: POSITIVE RATINGS OVER THE YEARS OF “THE RELATIONS AMONG ETHNIC GROUPS IN THE HOUSTON AREA” (1992-2007)



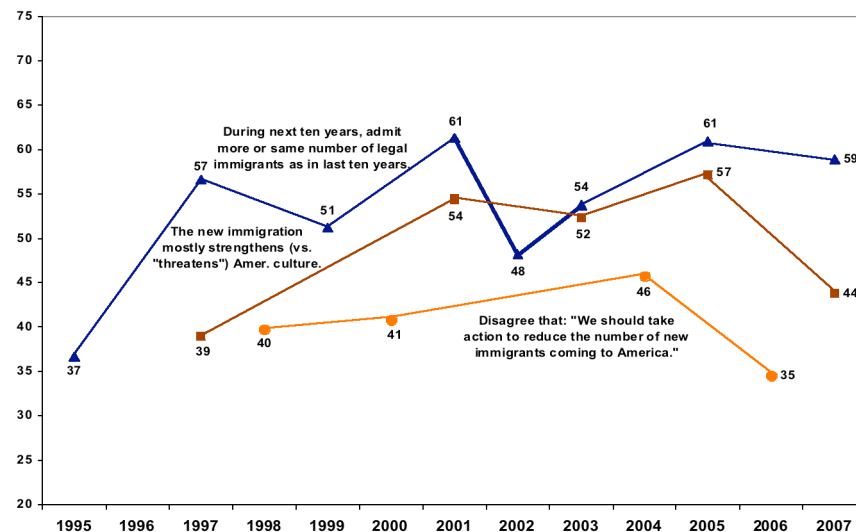
- When asked more directly if they thought “the increasing ethnic diversity in Houston brought about by immigration is a good thing or a bad thing,” the percent saying it was a “good thing” grew from 54% in 1994, to 63% in 1999, to 67% in 2005, before dropping to 62% in 2007 (Figure 7).
- In a similar question asked in alternating years — “Do you think the increasing ethnic diversity in Houston will eventually become a source of great strength for the city or a growing problem for the city?” — the proportion seeing diversity as a strength increased consistently from 57% in 1996, to 64% in 2000, to 69% in 2004, and then dropped to 60% in 2006.

FIGURE 7: ATTITUDES TOWARD HOUSTON’S INCREASING ETHNIC DIVERSITY (1994–2007)



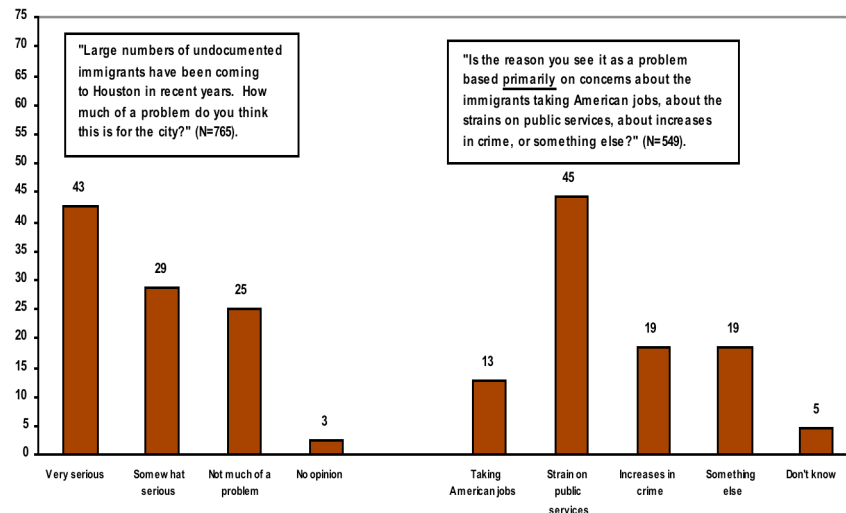
* *A reversal in the increasingly positive views of immigration:* Until two years ago, the surveys also recorded growing approval of the burgeoning immigration that has so decisively been transforming the ethnic composition of this region and revitalizing the local economy. In 2006 and 2007, all the relevant measures have once again shown declining support (Figure 8).

FIGURE 8: CHANGING PERSPECTIVES ON THE NEW IMMIGRATION (1995–2007)



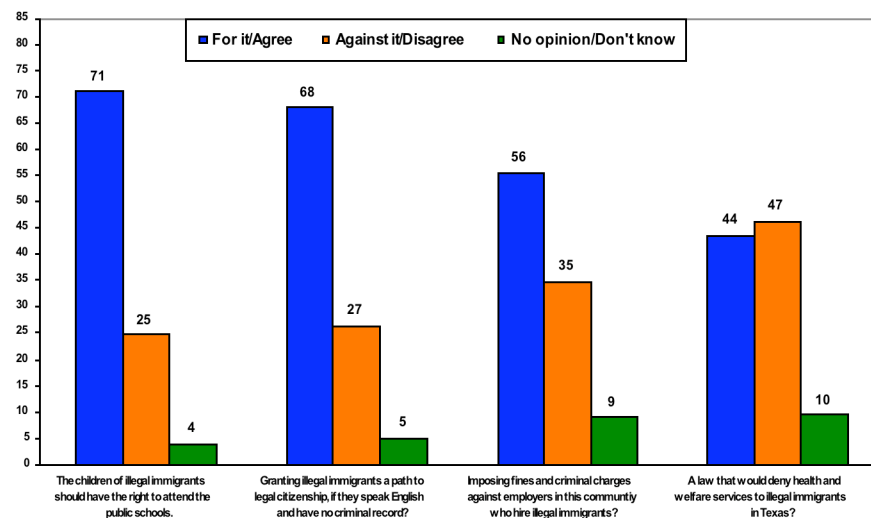
- The proportion saying that the new immigration mostly “strengthens American culture,” rather than “threatens American culture,” grew from 39% in 1997, to 54% in 2001, to 57% in 2005, and then dropped dramatically to 44% in 2007. Conversely, the numbers saying that the increasing immigration mostly “threatens American culture” rose from 31% in 2005 to 43% in this year’s survey.
- The percent of respondents who *disagreed* with the suggestion that “we should take action to reduce the number of new immigrants coming to America” grew slowly from 40% in 1998 to 46% in 2004. The proportion rejecting the call for more restrictions on immigration dropped to 35% in 2006, and the numbers calling for more restrictive policies grew from 48% in 2004 to 58% in last year’s survey.
- The proportion of Harris County residents who said they wanted more or the same number of legal immigrants to be admitted in the next ten years increased from 48% in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 in early 2002 to 61% in 2005, before also dropping (slightly) to 59% in this year’s survey.
- Area residents (like most Americans) are particularly concerned about the influx of “illegal” immigrants. When asked in the 2006 survey about the “large numbers of undocumented immigrants (who) have been coming to Houston in recent years,” 43% said they thought this was a “very serious” problem for the city, another 29% said “somewhat serious,” and just 25% believed that it was “not much of a problem” (Figure 9).

FIGURE 9: BELIEFS ABOUT UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS (HOUSTON AREA SURVEY, 2006)



- When the 72% of respondents who said the problem of undocumented immigration was at least somewhat serious were asked why they felt that way, 45% expressed concern about “the strains on public services (such as schools and hospitals).” Only 19% cited fears about an increase in crime, and just 13% were worried about the immigrants taking American jobs.

FIGURE 10: ATTITUDES TOWARD “ILLEGAL” IMMIGRATION (FROM THE 2007 SURVEY)



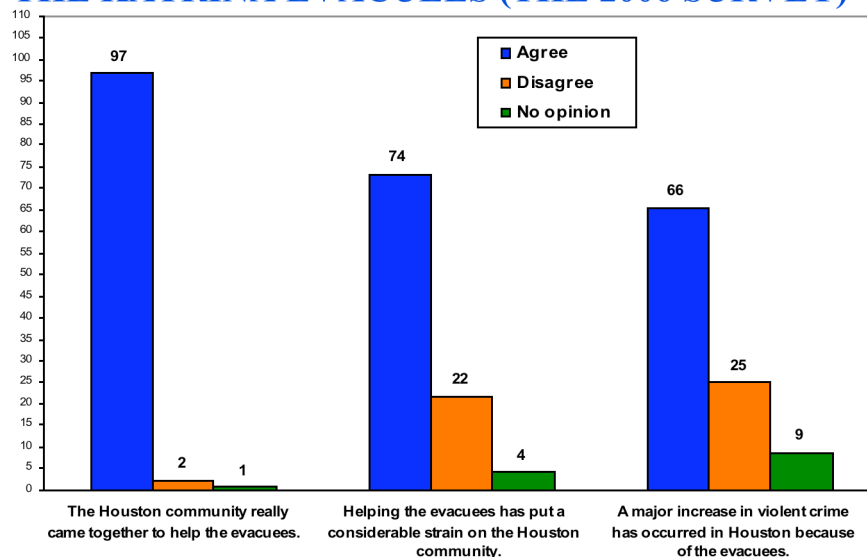
* **Support for immigration reform:** Despite these growing concerns, when the survey respondents in 2007 were asked about a variety of proposals regarding the undocumented immigrants currently living in the United States, they expressed am-

bivalent but generally more supportive attitudes than in past years, and their views overall seem quite balanced and empathetic (Figure 10, above).

- By 71% to 25%, area residents in this year's survey agreed that "the children of illegal immigrants should have the right to attend the public schools." This represents a significant increase from the 61% who felt that way in 1995, and from 54% in 1985.
- In an important question asked for the first time this year, by 68% to 27% the survey respondents were decisively in favor of "granting illegal immigrants in the U.S. a path to legal citizenship, if they speak English and have no criminal record."
- At the same time, by 56% to 35%, they were also in support of "imposing fines and criminal charges against employers in this community who hire illegal immigrants."
- And by 44% to 47%, they were evenly divided (but slightly against) "a law that would deny health and welfare services to illegal immigrants in Texas." This again reflects a significantly more pro-immigrant view than in 1995, when the question was last asked and, by a margin of 53% to 42%, area residents were decidedly in favor of denying undocumented immigrants access to health and welfare benefits.

* **Assessments of Katrina:** Closely associated with immigration attitudes are perspectives on the Katrina evacuees, and here the concerns have grown dramatically in the year and a half since the hurricane.

FIGURE 11: THE EFFECTS ON HOUSTON OF THE KATRINA EVACUEES (THE 2006 SURVEY)

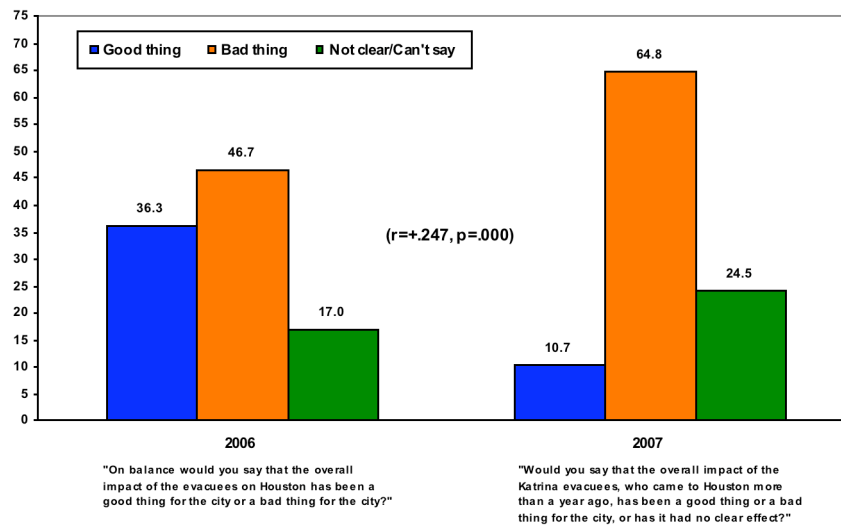


- There were mixed emotions in the 2006 survey, conducted six months after Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent evacuation: 97% agreed that "the Houston community really came together to help the evacuees." But 74% also concurred with the suggestion that "helping the evacuees has put a

considerable strain on the Houston community,” and 66% were convinced that “a major increase in violent crime has occurred in Houston because of the evacuees” (Figure 11, above).

- When asked in 2006 for their summary assessments, 47% of area residents said that “the overall impact of the evacuees on Houston has been a bad thing for the city,” but 36% said it has been “a good thing for the city.”
- The question was repeated in 2007: “Would you say that the overall impact of the Katrina evacuees, who came to Houston more than a year ago, has been a good thing or a bad thing for the city, or has it had no clear effect?” In this year’s survey, 65% asserted that the influx of the Katrina evacuees has been “a bad thing for the city.” Only 11% still believed that these newcomers have had a positive impact on Houston (Figure 12).

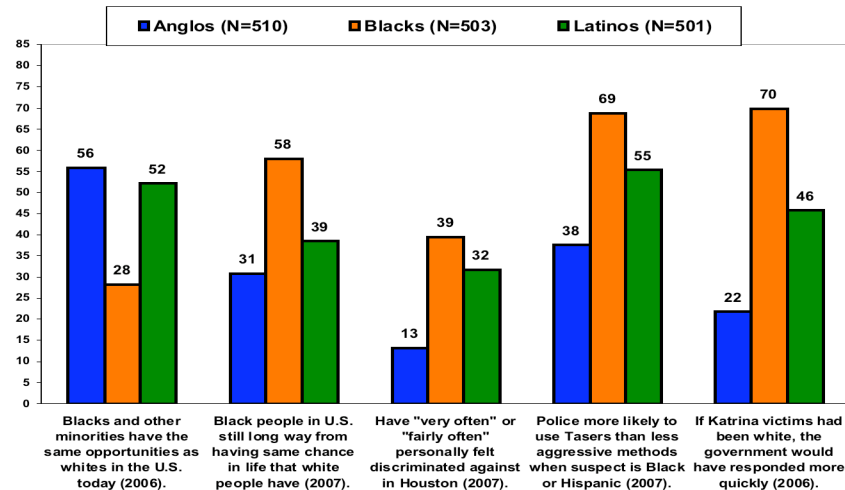
FIGURE 12: SUMMARY ASSESSMENTS OF THE KATRINA EXPERIENCE (2006, 2007)



* **The ethnic divides:** Consistently over the years, the surveys have documented striking differences between Anglos on the one hand, and blacks and (to a lesser extent) Latinos and Asians on the other, in their beliefs about equality of opportunity and the persistence of discrimination in Houston and America today. The contrasting perceptions are clearly seen in findings from the two most recent “expanded” surveys, which include additional interviews each year to reach representative samples of at least 500 from Houston’s three major ethnic communities (Figure 13).

- In the 2006 survey, 56% of Anglos and 52% of Latinos agreed that “blacks and other minorities have the same opportunities as whites in the U.S. today” — but 69% of African Americans *disagreed*.
- In 2007, 58% of the African-American respondents agreed that “black people in the U.S. are still a long way from having the same chance in life that white people have,” but only 39% of Latinos and 31% of Anglos believed that to be true.

FIGURE 13: ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN BELIEFS ABOUT DISCRIMINATION IN AMERICA TODAY (THE “EXPANDED” SURVEYS IN 2006, 2007)



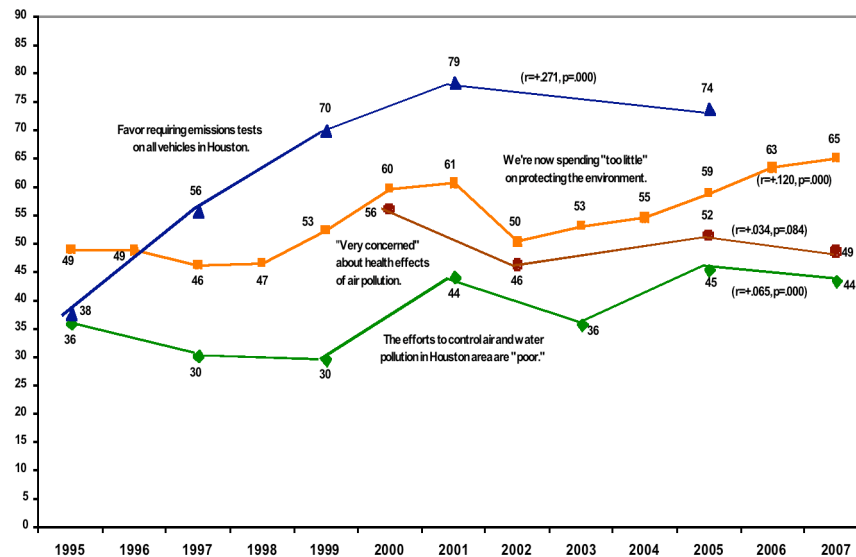
- When asked in 2007 how often they personally have felt discriminated against in Houston because of their ethnicity, 39% of blacks said “very often” or “fairly often,” as did 32% of Latinos, but just 13% of Anglos.
- In this year’s survey, 69% of African Americans and 55% of Latinos agreed that “the police are more likely to use Taser devices than less aggressive methods when the suspect is black or Hispanic.” Only 38% of Anglos believed that the police discriminate in that way.
- Similarly, 69% of Anglos agreed with the suggestion that “the use of Taser devices by the police makes deadly force less likely.” Just 47% of African Americans and 53% of Latinos concurred with this assertion.
- In the 2006 survey, respondents were asked this question about the Katrina disaster: “Most of the people who were stranded in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina were African Americans. If instead most of the victims had been white, do you think the government would have responded more quickly to the situation, less quickly, or would that not have made any difference?” Among the Anglos in Houston, 71% said that race played no role in the government’s response, but 70% of the black respondents and 46% of the Latinos said the government would have responded more quickly if most of the victims had been white.

(5) Growing support for environmental initiatives and for urban planning.

* *Assessments of environmental conditions:* Concerns about the state of the local environment have remained firm or grown stronger in recent years (Figure 14).

- The percent of area residents who gave the lowest possible rating (“poor”) to “the control of air and water pollution in the Houston area” increased from 36% in 2003 to 45% in 2005 and 44% in 2007.

**FIGURE 14: AIR POLLUTION CONCERNS
IN THE HOUSTON AREA (1995-2007)**



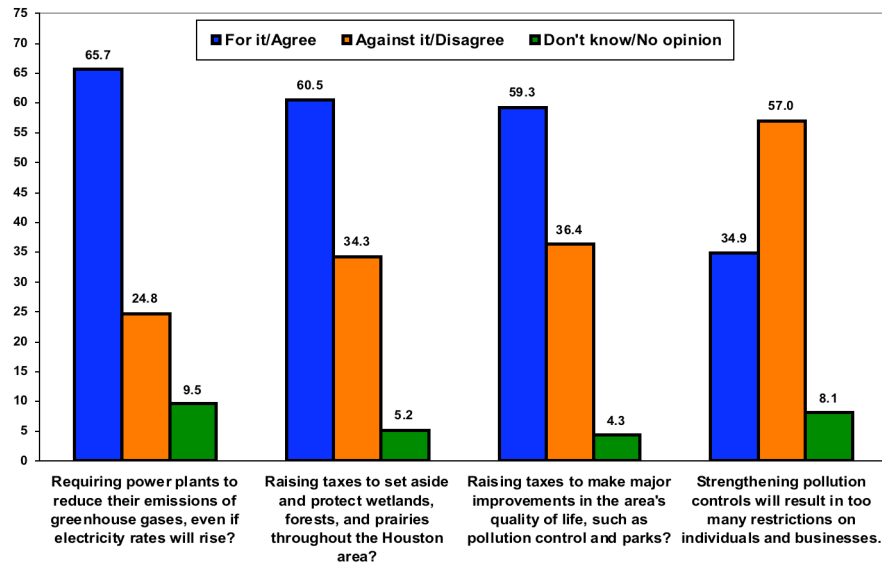
- The percent who were “very concerned” about the effects of air pollution on their family’s health was 46% in 2002, 52% in 2005, and 49% in 2007.
- When asked directly whether they thought air pollution in the area over the past three years has gotten better, worse, or stayed about the same, 43% in this year’s survey said the pollution was getting worse; only 9% thought the region’s air quality was improving (unchanged from 2005).
- More generally, as indicated in Figure 14, the proportion saying we are now spending “too little” nationally on “improving and protecting the environment” grew from 49% in 1995, to 53% in 2003, and to 65% in 2007. The numbers this year are higher than at any time in the past 15 years.

* **Environmental tradeoffs:** Several new items in 2007 asked about environmental initiatives while drawing explicit attention to the inherent tradeoffs. On every question, respondents indicated a willingness to pay the associated costs (Figure 15).

- By 66% to 25%, area residents in 2007 were in favor of “requiring power plants to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases, even if electricity rates will rise.”
- (Not coincidentally, 51% also believed that “the high global temperatures we’ve experienced in recent years” are mainly caused by “human activities”; 36% attributed the higher temperatures to “normal climate cycles.” And responses on this question predict more powerfully than any other attitudinal or demographic variable the extent of the respondents’ environmental concerns and of their support for these environmental initiatives.)
- By 61% to 34%, area residents approved of “raising taxes to set aside and protect wetlands, forests, and prairies throughout the Houston area.”

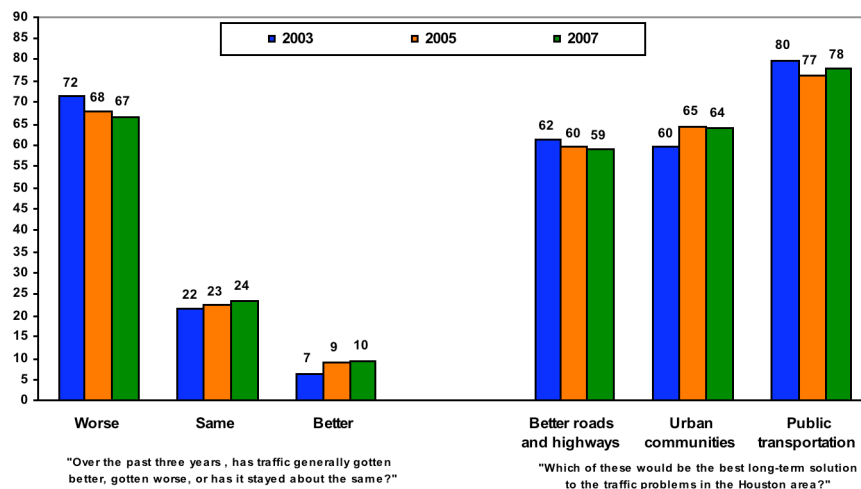
- By 59% to 36%, they were in favor of “raising taxes to make major improvements in the Houston area’s quality of life, such as pollution control and park improvements.”
- And by a margin of 57% to 35%, they decisively rejected the suggestion that “strengthening pollution controls will result in too many restrictions on individuals and businesses.”

FIGURE 15: ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS AND TRADEOFFS (THE 2007 SURVEY)



* **Support for mass transit:** The survey respondents in 2007 were also clear in their conviction that the best solution to Houston’s traffic problems lies in improved mass transit rather than expanded roads and highways (Figure 16).

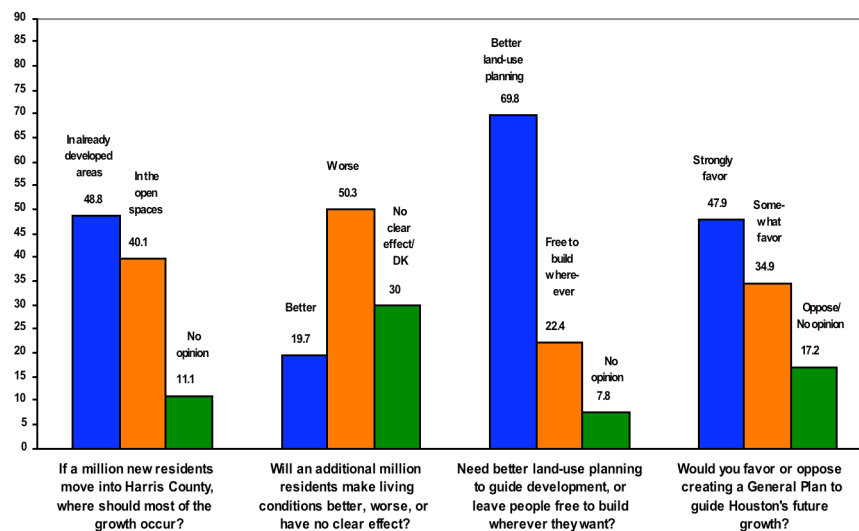
FIGURE 16: ASSESSMENTS OF TRAFFIC IN THE HOUSTON AREA AND OF THREE POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS (2003, 2005, 2007)



- In 2007, 67% of area residents said that traffic in the Houston area has gotten worse in the past three years; just 10% thought mobility had improved. These figures were virtually unchanged from previous years.
- When asked to choose the best two out of three proposed solutions to traffic congestion, 78% named “making improvements in public transportation, such as trains, buses, and light rail” in either first or second place; and 64% called for “developing communities where people can live closer to where they work and shop.” Just 59% believed the region’s traffic problems could be solved by “building bigger and better roads and highways.”
- In a new question this year, respondents were asked directly what they considered to be the best way to spend the region’s transportation dollars: 54% thought the money should be used “to improve rail and buses.” Only 37% called instead for more spending “to expand existing highways.”

* **Urban planning:** The 2007 survey also included several new questions about the projected increases in the Harris County population and about efforts to guide the Houston area’s future growth (Figure 17).

FIGURE 17: ASSESSMENTS OF POPULATION GROWTH AND URBAN PLANNING (2007 SURVEY)



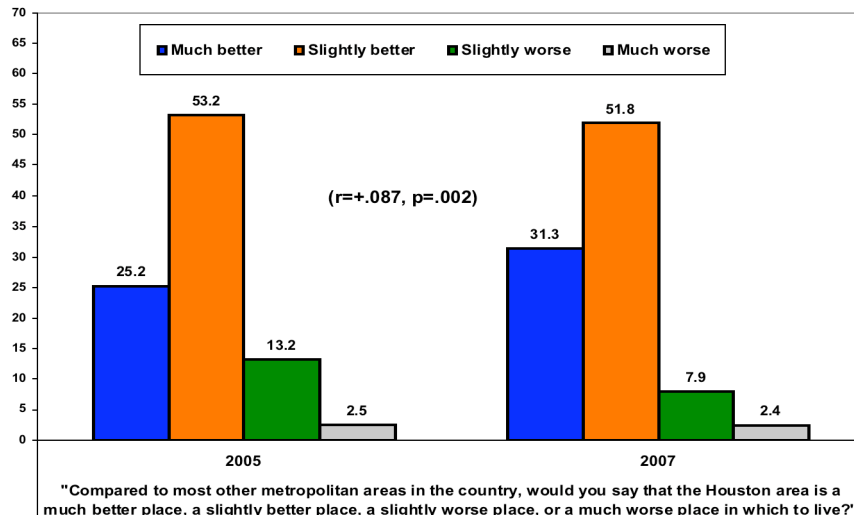
- “During the next 20 years,” the survey participants were told, “Harris County will need to build new housing, shops, and workplaces for more than a million additional residents,” and the respondents were asked where they thought most of that growth should occur. By the narrow but significant margin of 49% to 40%, they said it would be better if most of the growth occurs “in developed areas where services, streets, and sewer lines already exist,” rather than “in the undeveloped open spaces in the county.”
- When queried about the impact of an additional million residents on the overall living conditions in Harris County, fully 50% said the growth will make things worse. Just 20% thought living conditions will improve; and 30% foresaw no clear effects or were otherwise unable to give an opinion.

- The public's concerns about the projected growth translate into strong support for some form of urban planning: 70% in this year's survey agreed that "we need better land-use planning to guide development in the Houston area." Only 22% believed instead that "people or businesses should be free to build wherever they want." (This was unchanged from 2005.)
- And of all the adult citizens residing in this famously "unplanned city," 83% were strongly (48%) or somewhat (35%) in favor of "creating a general plan to guide Houston's future growth." Just 11% were opposed.

(6) Area residents are happy to be living in Houston, pessimistic about the country's direction, and shifting their support away from the Republican Party.

* ***Houston as a place to live:*** "Compared to most other metropolitan areas in the country," respondents were asked in 2005 and again in 2007, "Would you say that the Houston area is a much better place, a slightly better place, a slightly worse place, or a much worse place in which to live?" In this year's survey, 31% (up from 25% in 2005) said Houston was a "much better" place, and another 52% said it was "slightly better." Only 8% thought Houston was "slightly worse," and just 2% said it was "much worse" than most other cities as a place to live (Figure 18).

FIGURE 18: RATINGS OF THE HOUSTON AREA IN GENERAL AS A PLACE TO LIVE (2005, 2007)



* ***The American future:*** When asked if they thought "the country is headed for better times or more difficult times," area residents in 2006 were more pessimistic about the American future than they had been in any of the 18 previous years of surveys. In 2004, the respondents were evenly divided on the country's direction, with 47% saying "more difficult times" and 45% "better times." In 2005, 54% said "more difficult," and 42% said "better." By February 2006, fully 68% believed that the nation was headed for more difficult times and only 26% were confident that better times still lay ahead. In this year's survey, the outlook was only a little less somber: 61%

in 2007 continued to foresee more difficult times, and 32% thought that the country was headed for a better future (Figure 19).

FIGURE 19: CHANGING PERSPECTIVES ON THE AMERICAN FUTURE (1988-2007)

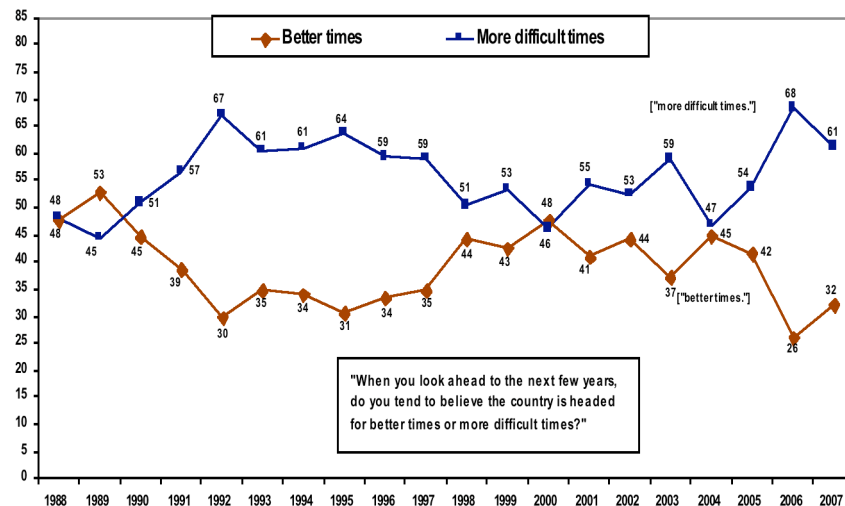
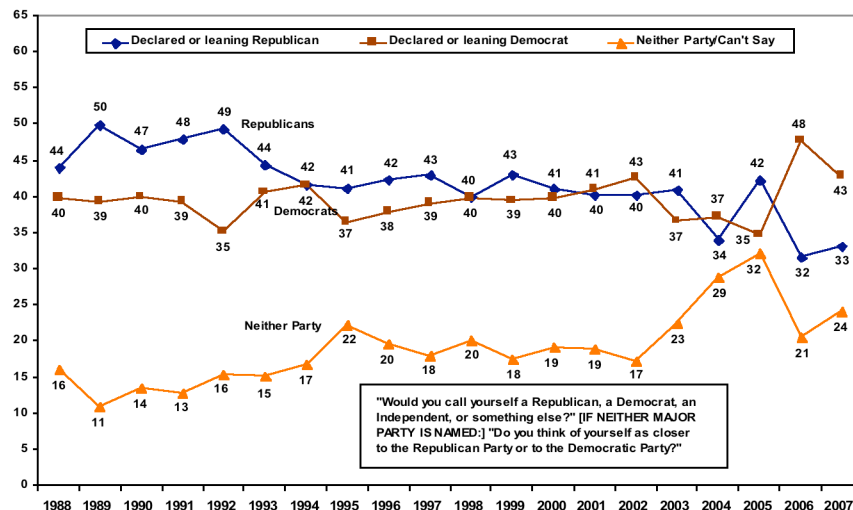


FIGURE 20: PARTY PREFERENCES AMONG HARRIS COUNTY RESIDENTS (1988-2007)



* **Party affiliations:** During most of the past 20 years, Harris County residents have been consistently, if slightly, more Republican than Democrat in their political leanings. Between 1988 and 2005, Republicans across the years claimed the allegiance of an average of 43% of all area residents, Democrats were preferred by 39%, and 18% were unable or unwilling to give a party preference. In last year's survey, the pattern changed: 48% of the respondents in 2006 said they preferred the Democratic Party (up decisively from 35% in 2005), and in this year's survey 43% expressed

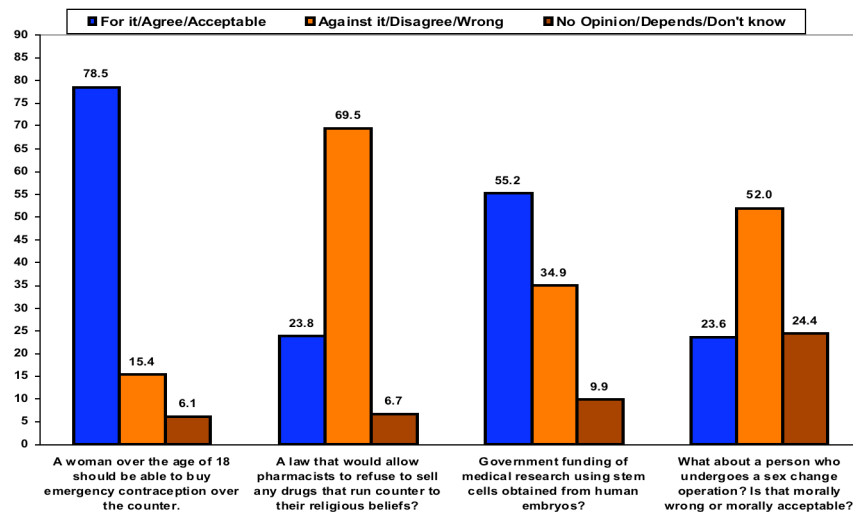
support for the Democrats. Preference for the Republican Party dropped from 42% in 2005 to 32% in 2006 and 33% in 2007 (Figure 20).

(7) Some additional noteworthy findings from the 2007 Houston Area Survey.

* ***Moral judgments:*** There were new questions this year about emergency contraception, stem cell research, and transgender persons (Figure 21).

- Two new items explored attitudes toward emergency contraception, a.k.a. “the morning-after pill.” By 79% to 15%, area residents decisively agreed that “a woman over the age of 18 should be able to buy emergency contraception over the counter.” And by 70% to 24%, they were opposed to “a law that would allow pharmacists to refuse to sell any drugs, such as emergency contraception, that run counter to their religious beliefs.”

**FIGURE 21: ATTITUDES TOWARD OTHER
“SOCIAL AGENDA” ISSUES (THE 2007 SURVEY)**



- By 55% to 35%, the respondents were in favor of “government funding of medical research using stem cells obtained from human embryos.”
- And when asked about “a person who undergoes a sex change operation,” 52% said they thought that was “morally wrong.” This was no different from the numbers in this year’s survey who also believed that abortion (51%) and homosexuality (52%) were morally wrong.

* ***The size of Houston’s ethnic communities:*** The 2007 survey asked the respondents, on a randomly rotating basis, to guess what percent of the Harris County population was represented by each of the area’s four major ethnic communities.

- The respondents greatly overestimated the percentage of African Americans in Harris County (their average guess: 30.1%; the census estimate for 2005: 17.8%). They also exaggerated the number of Asians (average estimate: 13.6%; census estimate: 6.6%) and, to a lesser extent, of Anglos (average guess: 43.4%; census estimate: 37.9%). Conversely, area resi-

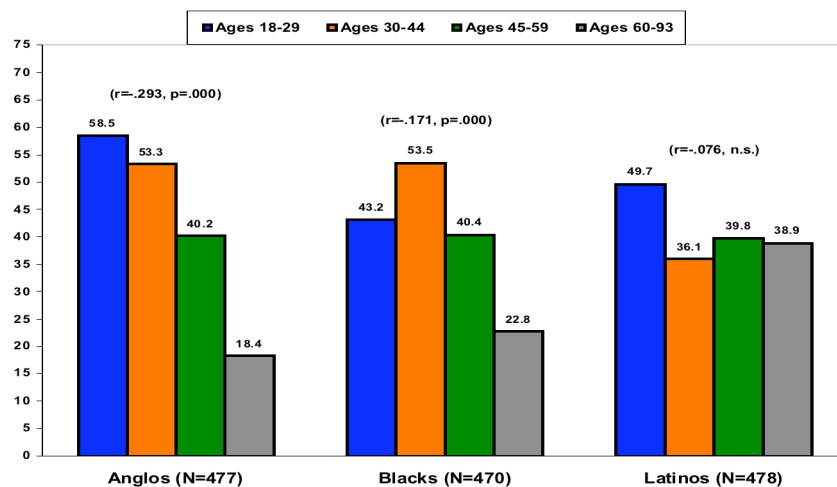
dents slightly underestimated the percentage of Latinos in Harris County (their average estimate: 34.8%; the census estimate: 37.8%).

- The black and Latino respondents were more likely than Anglos to overestimate the percentages of African Americans and Asians, and to underestimate the numbers of Hispanics in the county.

* **Interethnic dating:** Area residents were also asked in this year's survey if they had ever been involved in a romantic relationship with someone from a different ethnic background than theirs (Figure 22).

- *No differences across ethnic groups:* There were no significant differences among Houston's four major ethnic communities: 36% of Anglos said they had dated someone of a different ethnic background, and so did 46% of African Americans, 42% of Latinos, and 41% of Asians and others.
- *Differences across age groups:* Reflecting the ongoing transformations in interethnic relationships, there were significant differences by age among Anglos and African Americans, though not among Latinos. The generational differences were particularly clear for the Anglo respondents: 59% of the youngest group, aged 18 to 29, said they had indeed been involved in a romantic relationship with someone of a different ethnicity, as did 53% of those aged 30 to 44. This was also the case for 40% of the Anglo respondents aged 45 to 59, but for just 18% of those aged 60 and older.

FIGURE 22: INVOLVEMENT IN AN INTERETHNIC ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP, BY AGE AND ETHNICITY (IN THE 2007 "EXPANDED" SURVEY)



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