

Priorities and Performance: Philadelphians' Opinions about Philadelphia

An Economy League of Greater Philadelphia Poll Conducted by Temple University

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The Priorities and Performance Poll focuses on the issues on the minds of Philadelphians as they approach the task of choosing a new mayor. The Poll shows how residents of the city assess the quality of life and the quality of the public services available in Philadelphia. What, in the opinion of the public, should be the city's priorities? Where is the city succeeding, and where is it falling short? The Poll investigates in particular depth the public's views on questions of crime and safety, taxes and spending, education, and governance. Detailed demographic information allow the responses of particular groups of individuals to be compared and contrasted. The result is a remarkably rich and comprehensive portrait of the beliefs and opinions of Philadelphians as the mayoral election comes into view.

For the Poll, a scientifically selected representative sample of 802 Philadelphians age 18 or older were interviewed between February 16 and 26. With a sample of this size, the overall margin of error attributable to sampling is 3.5 percentage points.



Highlights

Quality of Life: Philadelphians like Philadelphia

- Philadelphians like Philadelphia. Fifty-three percent say the city is an excellent or good place to live, and 60 percent are similarly positive about their neighborhood. Fifty-six percent say they would continue to live in Philadelphia even if they had the opportunity to move elsewhere.
- Philadelphia is not equally appealing to all Philadelphians. Poorer residents are much less satisfied with the quality of life than wealthier residents. That difference seems to have a lot to do with where in the city people live. The difference between rich and poor is much greater when they speak of their neighborhood than when they speak of the city as a whole. The destinations to which people would prefer to move, if they could, also differ by income. Most of the wealthier would prefer to move out of Philadelphia altogether; many more of the poorer who would move would prefer to move to another neighborhood in the city.
- Older Philadelphians are more satisfied with the quality of life than younger ones.

Goals, Outcomes, and Public Services: Broad Agreement on Priorities

- Philadelphians regard personal safety as an extremely important, but they also regard education and health as extremely important policy areas; they regard cultural and recreational opportunities, and housing for low-income people as considerably less important.
- Where the safety issue differs from the issues of education and, especially, health is in Philadelphians' opinions about conditions in the city. The issue of safety is not necessarily the most important, but it is the area in which Philadelphians are least satisfied.
- Philadelphians are relatively satisfied with transportation and with cultural and recreational opportunities in the city.
- Philadelphians regard police and fire protection as the most important of public services, the public schools as somewhat less important.
- They are far more satisfied with the fire protection than with the police protection they receive. They are far less satisfied with the public schools than with any of the other public services listed, including street maintenance and street cleaning.
- There is generally wide agreement on priorities; there is not much disagreement on priorities among demographic groups.
- Older people are more satisfied with the city than younger people.

Crime and Safety: Disagreement about the Problem and the Remedies

- A large majority of Philadelphians—80 percent—feel “completely safe” or “pretty safe” in their homes at night. Only 50 percent feel that way when they are out in their neighborhood at night; 28 percent feel “a little unsafe” and 18 percent feel “not safe at all.”
- It is the city's murder rate that is on most Philadelphians' minds. Nearly two thirds say reducing the number of people murdered in Philadelphia is more important to them than making their street a safer place to live.
- Poorer residents are more likely than wealthier residents to feel unsafe, and the poorer are more concerned than the wealthier about safety in their neighborhoods.

- About 80 percent of Philadelphians would favor having more of the city’s police assigned to the public schools, to patrol their own neighborhood, or to patrol high-crime neighborhoods.
- Just 60 percent would favor a policy instructing the police in their neighborhood to stop and search people suspected of carrying an illegal gun.
- Seventy-one percent would be willing to pay higher taxes for more police, and 67 percent would pay more for “cameras to monitor city streets to help the police catch criminals.”
- Blacks are more likely than whites to feel unsafe and to favor having more of the city’s police assigned to the public schools, to patrol their own neighborhood, or to patrol high-crime neighborhoods. Blacks also are more likely to be willing to pay higher taxes for surveillance cameras.
- Blacks are much less satisfied with police protection in Philadelphia, much less likely to favor a policy instructing the police in their neighborhood to stop and search people suspected of carrying an illegal gun, and much less likely to be willing to pay higher taxes for more police.

Education: A High Priority, But Public Schools Sorely Lacking

- Only 3 percent think the public schools in Philadelphia are excellent. Thirty-four percent think the public schools are doing a poor job.
- By 45 percent to 30 percent, Philadelphians think the public schools would be better off with a School Board controlled by the state government than with a Board controlled by the city government.
- Three quarters of Philadelphians say they would be willing to pay higher city taxes for better schools, but fewer would be willing to pay higher taxes for more pre-kindergarten education, and only 61 percent would pay higher taxes to provide day care for more children.
- Wealthier Philadelphians—those more likely to be able to send their children to private schools or to leave the city with school-age children—are more critical of the public schools than poorer residents. The wealthier are no more willing to pay higher taxes for better public schools, however.

Taxes and Spending: Most Unwilling to Reduce Services to Cut Taxes

- Most Philadelphians would favor maintaining the current level of taxes and services in the city, but more than one third would prefer “more city services, even if that meant taxes would have to be raised.” Only 10 percent would prefer “lower taxes, even if that meant city services would have to be cut.”
- Democrats are much more likely than Republicans to favor more city services, with Independents in between. Only 11 percent of Republicans (10 percent of Independents and 8 percent of Democrats), however, would prefer lower taxes if that meant city services would have to be cut.
- If Philadelphia taxes were to be cut, almost equal numbers would like to see the wage tax and the real estate tax cut; few would cut the taxes on businesses. If taxes had to be raised, however, a majority would prefer the taxes on businesses be raised. This is true of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents alike.
- A majority believes the city government wastes a lot of money Philadelphians pay in taxes. Democrats are only slightly less likely than Republicans to hold this view.

Governance: Philadelphians Take a Dim View of City Government

- Philadelphians are critical of their city’s government. Just 26 percent of Philadelphians say the government is doing a good or excellent job; 54 percent say the job Philadelphia’s government is doing is only fair, and 19 percent say it’s doing a poor job.

- Negative opinions of Mayor Street outnumber positive opinions, 42-32. Opinions about the Philadelphia City Council are much more positive than opinions about Mayor Street, positive opinions about the Council are only a little more common than negative opinions.
- Just 22 percent of Philadelphians feel they can trust the city government to do what is right most of the time or just about always; 55 percent trust the city government only some of the time, and 21 percent trust it “almost never.”
- Forty-two percent believe that quite a few of the people running the city government are corrupt.
- Large majorities believe the people in city government do not care much what ordinary people think, and the city government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves, rather than for the benefit of all Philadelphians.
- Democrats take a more positive view than Republicans and Independents of Mayor Street and the City Council.
- About the problems with city government more generally there is widespread agreement. The opinions of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents do not differ much, for example. Neither do the opinions of blacks and whites.

The Mayoral Candidates: Many Philadelphians Have No Opinion Yet

- All five mayoral candidates are about equally well known. In each case, about one third of Philadelphians know too little to offer an opinion of the candidate.
- Fattah is slightly better known than the others.