



New Pew Poll Shows Residents Upbeat About Philadelphia

Recent issues also examined: Philadelphia Gas Works, property taxes, police

Overview

A new poll from The Pew Charitable Trusts finds that Philadelphians have a more positive outlook about their city than at any time in the six years that Pew has been polling.

Nearly half of residents surveyed said Philadelphia is heading in the right direction, while a third said it is on the wrong track. Sixty-seven percent expect the city to improve in the next five years, while 18 percent expect it to get worse. Three times as many residents would recommend Philadelphia to a friend as a place to live as would not. And young adults see themselves as more likely to build their futures in the city than in the last Pew Philadelphia Poll, which was taken in the summer of 2013.

The positive outlook extends to government as well. Mayor Michael Nutter's approval rating stands at 52 percent, 13 points higher than in the previous survey. About as many Philadelphians approve of City Council's job performance as disapprove, a big gain since 2013.

The poll also covered current and recent policy issues and found that:

- Nearly half of Philadelphians have no opinion on selling Philadelphia Gas Works. Those who have a viewpoint reject a sale by a 2-1 ratio.
- Philadelphians are divided about whether to keep the 10-year tax abatement on new construction, reduce it, or eliminate it.
- Most residents remain unaware of the property tax overhaul known as the Actual Value Initiative. Among those who know about it, there is no real consensus over whether the change has made taxes more or less fair.
- Residents support the city's decision last year to decriminalize the possession of small amounts of marijuana, also by a 2-1 ratio.

In addition, 55 percent of those polled said they have "a great deal" or "a fair amount" of confidence in the city's police officers to treat blacks and whites equally; 42 percent said they had "just some" or "very little" confidence. Two-thirds of whites expressed confidence, and less than half of blacks did so.

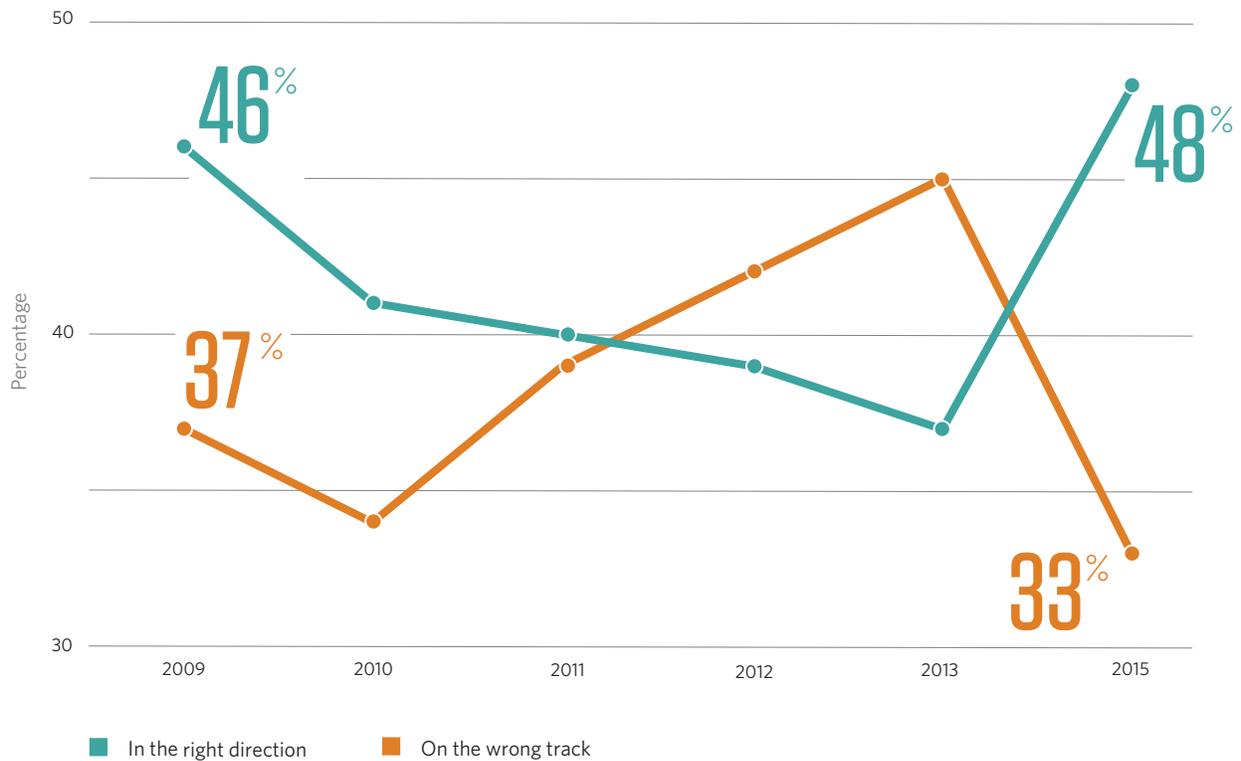
More broadly, two-thirds of Philadelphians have at least "a good amount" of respect for city police. However, only a third agrees with the statement that "almost all police are trustworthy and do their jobs properly."

The optimistic mood

The survey finds Philadelphians feeling good about their city and optimistic about its future. Forty-eight percent of residents polled said the city was headed in the right direction compared with 33 percent who said it was on the wrong track. The right-track number is the highest recorded in the six years that Pew has been polling in Philadelphia, and the 15-point margin between right track and wrong direction is the largest. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1

Where Philadelphians Think the City Is Headed

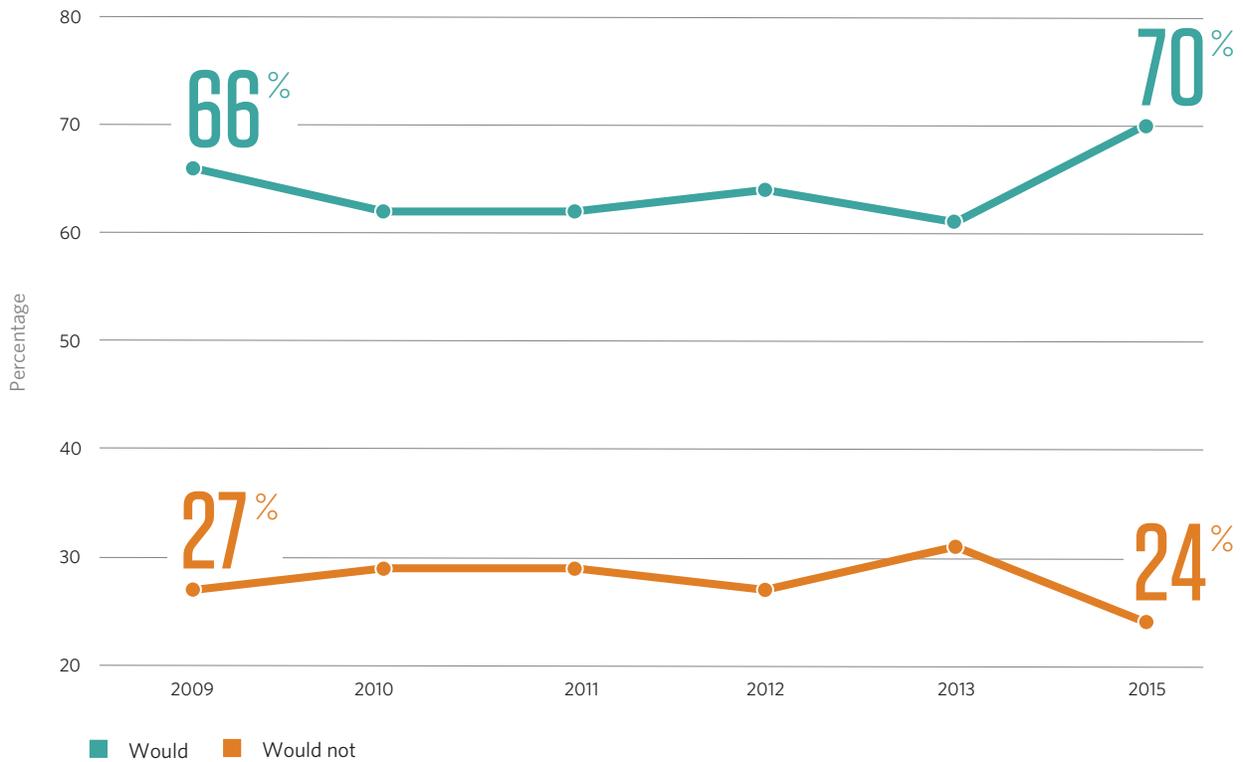


Source: The Pew Philadelphia Poll, 2015
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A similar pattern is evident in answers to other questions. Two-thirds expect the city to get better over the next five years while 18 percent expect it to get worse. In past surveys, a majority of Philadelphians have invariably expressed faith in the city's future. But in 2013, the optimists represented only 52 percent of those polled.

Rating the city as place to live, 70 percent would recommend it to a friend and 24 percent would not. Here, too, the percentage of people giving the positive response is the highest in six years of polling. (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2
 Recommend Philadelphia as a Place to Live

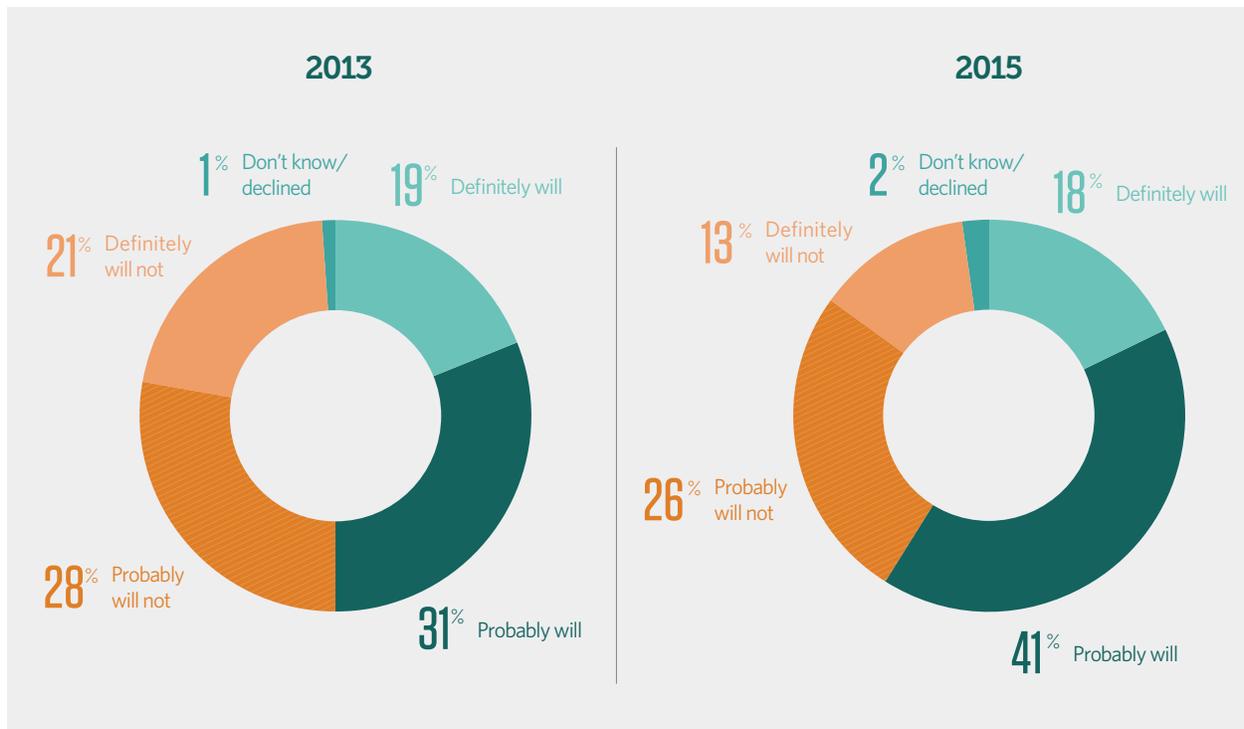


Source: The Pew Philadelphia Poll, 2015
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There are some consistent and relatively minor variations among demographic groups. For instance, 74 percent of whites would recommend the city compared with 69 percent of blacks and 65 percent of Hispanics. And residents ages 35 to 49, many of them parents of school-age children, were less likely to recommend the city (63 percent) than were young adults (71 percent) or those 50 and older (73 percent).

Another positive indicator for Philadelphia is that more young adults said they see themselves staying in the city than was the case in 2013. In that year’s survey, 49 percent of those ages 18 to 34 said they would probably not be living in the city in five or 10 years. This time, 39 percent said they expected to leave. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3
 Likely to Be Living in Philadelphia in 5-10 Years
 18- to 34-year-olds



Source: The Pew Philadelphia Poll, 2015
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Views of the Mayor and City Council

The upbeat outlook also was reflected in the public's view of Philadelphia's leaders.

Mayor Nutter approaches the end of his eight years in office with relatively high marks. In the new poll, 52 percent of Philadelphians approve of his job performance and 37 percent disapprove. Though not his strongest performance in the past six years, these numbers represent a dramatic recovery from 2013. At that time, 39 percent approved of the mayor's job performance and 52 percent disapproved.

Residents were more evenly divided on their assessment of City Council, with 40 percent approving its job performance and 42 percent disapproving. When Pew last polled, 30 percent approved of council and 57 percent disapproved.

Opinion on recent policy issues

In the survey, Philadelphians were asked for their views on a number of current or recent policy issues.

- **Philadelphia Gas Works:** Residents were asked about selling Philadelphia Gas Works, which Mayor Nutter proposed to help fund the municipal pension system and which City Council last year refused to consider. Thirty-eight percent of Philadelphians said they oppose a sale and 17 percent support it. A large percentage of those polled, 45 percent, had no opinion. (See Figure 4.)

Figure 4

Selling Philadelphia Gas Works

Response	Percentage
Approve	17%
Disapprove	38%
No opinion	45%

Source: The Pew Philadelphia Poll, 2015

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- **Tax policies:** On the city's 10-year tax abatement on new construction, opinions were split almost evenly among three options. Thirty-three percent want the abatement to be continued in its current form; 30 percent prefer to see it reduced in some way; and 30 percent favor its elimination.
Philadelphians were also asked about the impact of the property tax overhaul known as the Actual Value Initiative. In the summer of 2013, before homeowners received their first tax bills under the system, 26 percent of those who were aware of the initiative said it would make taxes more fair and 44 percent less fair.
In the new poll, with the tax system in place, 30 percent of those aware of the change said taxes have become more fair and 36 percent said they were less fair. Among homeowners, the results were similar: 34 percent said more fair and 37 percent said less. Sixty percent of the entire sample, including 38 percent of homeowners, said they had not heard about the Actual Value Initiative.
- **Decriminalization of marijuana:** There was a resounding endorsement of the city's 2014 decision to decriminalize possession of small amounts of marijuana, with 64 percent of residents approving and 32 percent disapproving. Those younger than 35 supported it more strongly (74 percent) than those 65 and older (42 percent).

Levels of confidence in the police

In 2014, a number of highly publicized incidents occurred in the United States in which black males were killed by police. The public discourse surrounding these incidents raised questions about how police deal with people of color. For that reason, the Pew poll asked Philadelphians about their level of confidence in local police to treat blacks and whites equally.

Overall, 55 percent of Philadelphians said they had a "great deal" or "fair amount" of confidence in the police in this regard while 42 percent said they had "just some" or "very little." (See Figure 5.)

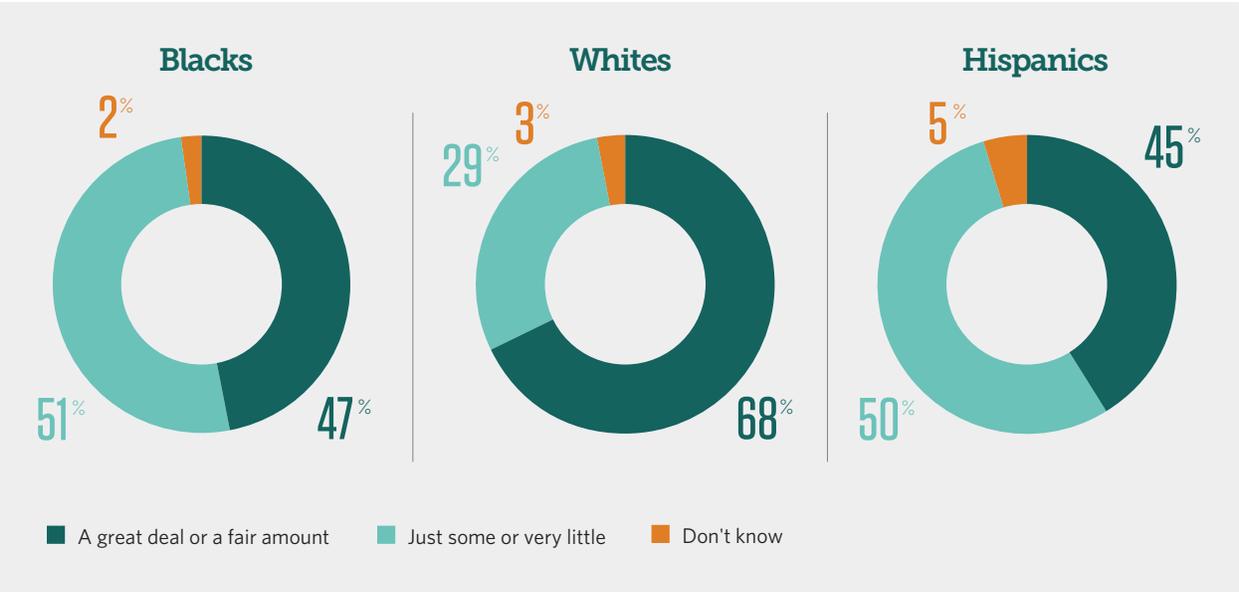
Figure 5
Philadelphians' Confidence in Their Police to Treat Blacks and Whites Equally
 All respondents

Response	Percentage
A great deal or a fair amount	55%
Just some or very little	42%
Don't know	3%

Source: The Pew Philadelphia Poll, 2015
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The racial and ethnic differences were pronounced. Sixty-eight percent of whites expressed confidence in the police to deliver equal treatment while 29 percent voiced a lack of confidence. Among blacks, the attitudes were quite different: 47 percent expressed confidence while 51 percent took the opposite viewpoint. (See Figure 6.) The results for Hispanics were similar to those for blacks.

Figure 6
Philadelphians' Confidence in Their Police to Treat Blacks and Whites Equally
 By racial/ethnic group



Source: The Pew Philadelphia Poll, 2015
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In answer to another, more general question, 67 percent of residents said they have “a great deal” or “a good amount” of respect for the police in Philadelphia compared with 33 percent who do not. Here, too, there was a significant racial and ethnic gap. Among whites, the split was 81 to 19 percent; among blacks, 56 to 43 percent; and among Hispanics, 58 to 41 percent.

Residents were also asked whether “almost all police” or “not all police” are trustworthy and do their jobs properly. Thirty-three percent chose the first response and 62 percent the second. For whites, the breakdown was 44 to 51 percent; for blacks, 23 to 70 percent; and for Hispanics, 24 to 73 percent.

About the survey

The Pew survey was conducted by telephone from Jan. 28 to Feb. 19, 2015, among a citywide random sample of 1,603 residents 18 and older. Interviews were conducted with 640 landline users and 963 cellphone users to reach a broad representative sample of Philadelphians.

The final sample was weighted to reflect the demographic breakdown of the city. The margin of error for the entire sample is approximately plus or minus 2.5 percentage points. The margin of error is higher for subgroups. Surveys are subject to other error sources as well, including sampling coverage error, record error, and respondent error.

Abt SRBI designed the survey and conducted all interviews, working with Cliff Zukin, a veteran pollster and professor of public policy and political science at Rutgers University.

This brief was written by Larry Eichel, a director of Pew’s Philadelphia program who oversees the Philadelphia research initiative.

About the Philadelphia research initiative

Pew’s Philadelphia research initiative provides timely, impartial research and analysis on key issues facing Philadelphia for the benefit of the city’s residents and leaders.

For further information, please visit:

pewtrusts.org/philaresearch

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