



Philadelphians' Attitudes Toward Their City Take a Downward Turn

New Poll Finds Concerns About City's Prospects, Dim View of Political Leadership

Overview

A new poll from The Pew Charitable Trusts finds that Philadelphians are concerned about the city's prospects and take a dim view of its political leadership.

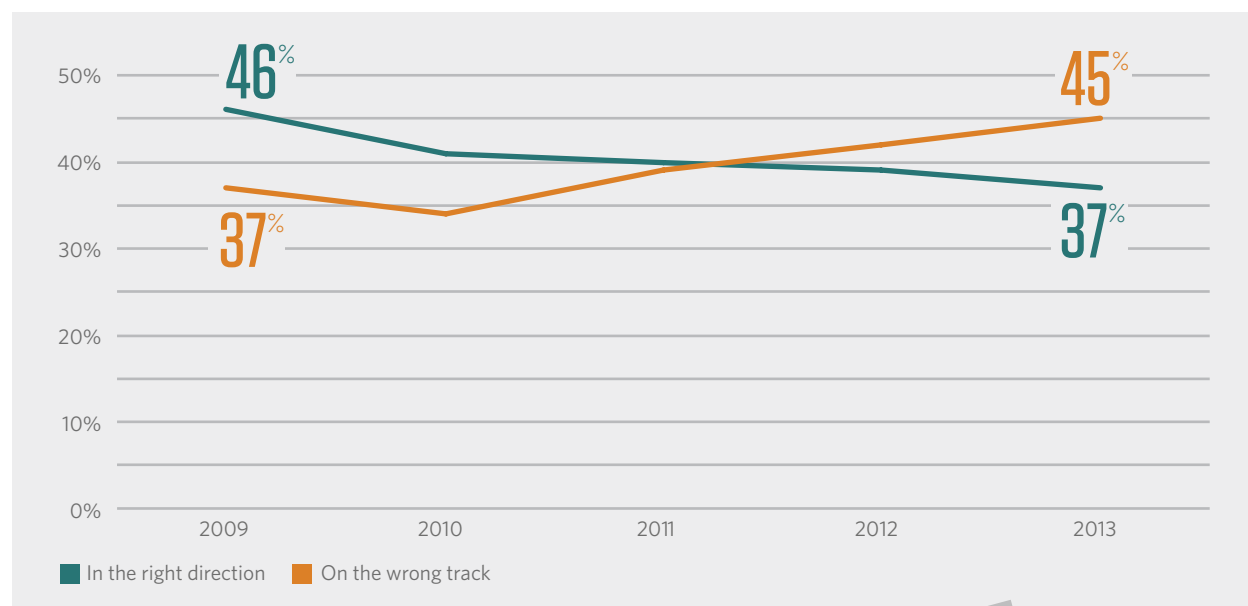
On the whole, residents gave the city lower ratings in this poll than at any time during the five years that Pew has been polling locally:

- Forty-five percent of respondents said the city was "off on the wrong track," compared with 37 percent who said it was "headed in the right direction." In 2009, the responses were reversed, with 37 percent choosing the wrong track and 46 percent the right direction.
- Thirty-seven percent of residents said the city had become a worse place to live during the past five years, while 25 percent said it was better. In 2009, only 27 percent said worse, and 33 percent indicated better.
- And fewer Philadelphians said they expected the city to improve in the next five years. In the current survey, optimists outnumbered pessimists 52 percent to 27 percent. In 2009, it was 68 percent to 14 percent.

Philadelphia's elected officials did not escape these downward trends in residents' attitudes. Mayor Michael Nutter's ratings were the lowest recorded in the five years of Pew surveys.

Figure 1

Where Philadelphians Think the City Is Headed



Source: The Pew Philadelphia Poll
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Only 39 percent of residents said they approved of the mayor's job performance, while 52 percent disapproved. This is a dramatic change from January 2012, when 60 percent approved of his work—his highest rating since 2009—and 30 percent disapproved.

The City Council's job approval rating also was lower, though it did not fall as much. Thirty percent of respondents approved of the job the council is doing, a decrease of 5 percentage points from 2012.

Despite these negative perceptions, three-fifths of Philadelphians said they considered the city a good or excellent place to live, roughly the same as in previous years.

The downbeat mood

Philadelphians' more negative view of the city showed up in a number of ways.

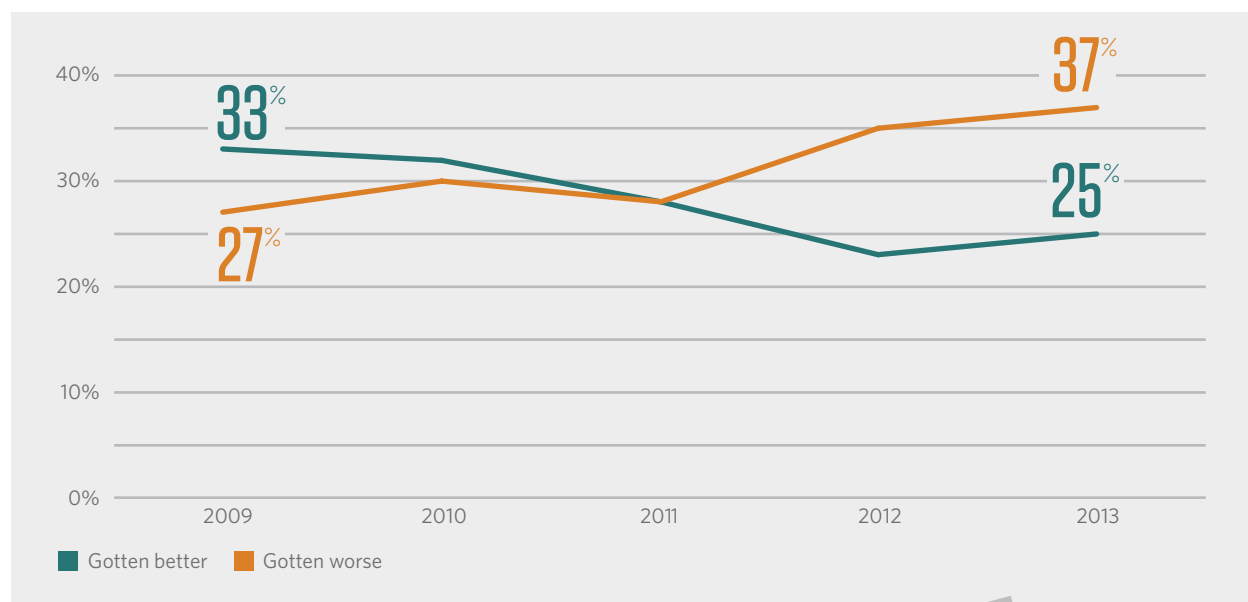
On the question of whether the city is headed in the right direction or off on the wrong track, 45 percent of residents chose wrong track and 37 percent opted for right direction, the worst numbers in the poll's history. (See Figure 1.)

Where Philadelphians think the city is headed

Asked how the city has changed in the past five years, 37 percent of respondents said it had gotten worse while 25 percent said better, a grimmer result than in years past. (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2

How Philadelphia Has Fared in the Past Five Years



Source: The Pew Philadelphia Poll
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How Philadelphia has fared in the past five years

The biggest shift occurred in residents' view of the future. From a high of 68 percent in 2009, the share of Philadelphians expecting the city to be better off in five years dropped to 52 percent this year. (See Figure 3.)

Expectations for Philadelphia in the next five years

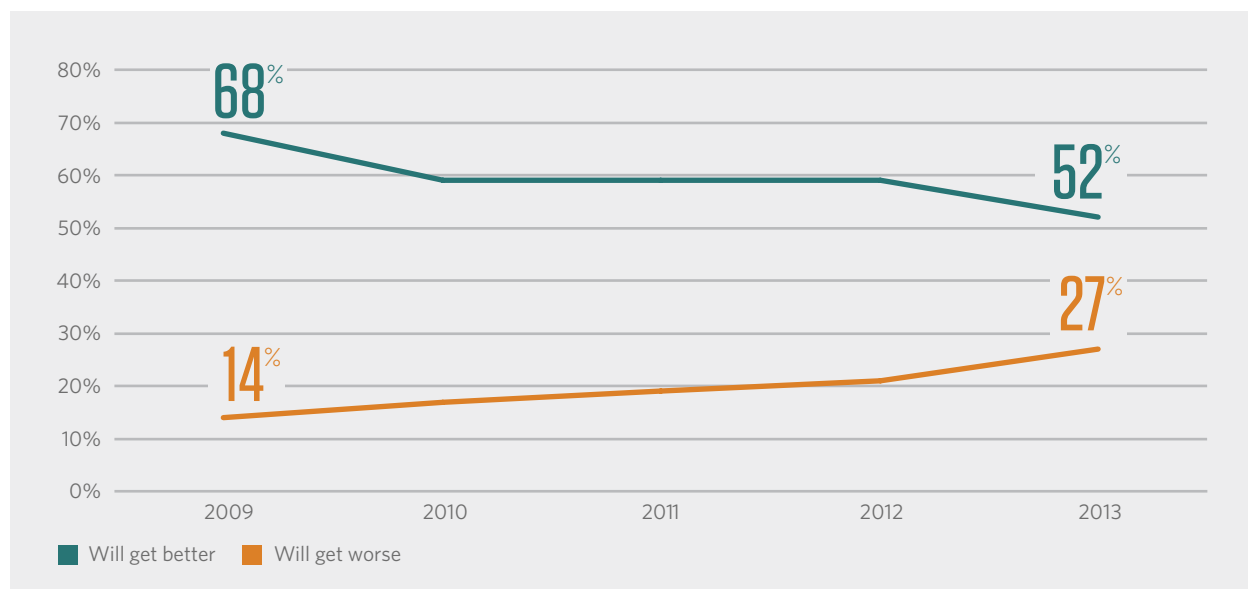
Over the five years of Pew polling in Philadelphia, two groups have tended to view the city in a particularly positive light: residents with family incomes above \$100,000 and individuals who have lived in the city for 10 or fewer years. In 2013, the level of optimism fell more among these two groups than among a number of others.

On the right track/wrong direction question, for instance, the percentage of both groups opting for the right track option fell 9 percentage points—from 58 to 49 percent for the higher-income individuals and from 52 to 43 percent for the relative newcomers—while it dropped only 2 percentage points among all respondents.

Some of the most negative views of the city came from residents of Northeast Philadelphia. Forty-four percent of them said that Philadelphia was worse off than five years earlier—compared with 37 percent for the citywide sample—and 38 percent said they expected the city to get worse in five years, compared with 27 percent citywide.

Although the survey did not ask residents why they gave a particular answer to any question, the poll was conducted during a time when local news was dominated by issues that cast Philadelphia in a negative light. Among them were the school funding crisis and the aftermath of the deadly building collapse in Center City.

Figure 3
Expectations for Philadelphia in the Next Five Years



Source: The Pew Philadelphia Poll
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Several elements of good feeling remained in place. For example, 60 percent of residents rated the city as a good or excellent place to live. In the five years that Pew has polled Philadelphians, the answers to that question have fluctuated in a narrow range, from 60 percent to 63 percent.

Dissatisfaction with elected officials

The generally downbeat outlook extends to Philadelphians' views of elected officials. This pessimism was most evident in the dramatic change in the approval rating for Mayor Nutter.

Since the previous poll in January 2012, the percentage of residents who said they approved of his performance in office fell from 60 percent to 39 percent, a drop of 21 percentage points, while the percentage who disapproved of his performance rose from 30 percent to 52 percent. The shift was evident across geographic, economic, and demographic lines. (See Figure 4.)

Philadelphians rate Mayor Michael Nutter's job performance

In previous surveys, the mayor has enjoyed a higher level of support from whites than from blacks. That pattern continued this year, with backing for the mayor falling by about the same amount among both groups.

In the 2012 poll, 69 percent of whites approved of Mayor Nutter's job performance, while 24 percent disapproved. This year, his approval rating among white residents fell by 23 percentage points, leaving them split just about evenly on the mayor, with 46 percent approving and 45 percent disapproving.

Figure 4

Philadelphians Rate Mayor Michael Nutter's Job Performance

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Approve	47%	53%	52%	60%	39%
Disapprove	39%	32%	37%	30%	52%
Don't know/refused	13%	15%	11%	10%	9%

Source: The Pew Philadelphia Poll
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In 2012, black residents approved of the mayor by 52 percent to 38 percent. In the 2013 survey, their positive assessment of him declined by 22 percentage points. Only 30 percent of them said they approved of the mayor's work in office, while 62 percent disapproved. (See Figure 5.)

Figure 5

How Approval Ratings of Mayor Nutter Have Changed

	2012	2013
Whites	69%	46%
Blacks	52%	30%

Source: The Pew Philadelphia Poll
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The survey did not ask respondents to explain their views about Mayor Nutter, nor did it question them about specific aspects of his performance.

This year's poll also showed a continuation of the steady decline in public approval of the City Council. In 2009, Philadelphians were split on the council's performance, with 39 percent approving and the same share disapproving. This year, 57 percent said they disapproved of the council's work and 30 percent approved, a ratio of nearly 2-to-1.

Over the years, support for the council has been somewhat higher among blacks than among whites. That was true again this year, with approval of the council's performance falling by roughly the same amount among both groups. The approval rate was 31 percent for blacks, 27 percent for whites.

About the survey

The Pew survey was conducted by telephone between July 23 and Aug. 13, 2013, among a citywide random sample of 1,605 residents age 18 and older. Interviews were conducted with 530 landline users and 1,075 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 Public Affairs designed the survey and conducted all interviewing, working with Cliff Zukin, a veteran pollster and a professor of public policy and political science at Rutgers University.

This report was written by Emily Dowdall, a senior associate with Pew's Philadelphia research initiative, and edited by Larry Eichel, a director of Pew's Philadelphia program who oversees the 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.

Visit www.pewtrusts.org/philaresearch for more information.

Pew Philadelphia Poll/Abt SRBI

Topline Results for Selected Questions

July 23 to Aug. 13, 2013

Base is 1,605 Philadelphia residents.

To begin with, for how many years have you lived in Philadelphia, or have you lived here all of your life?

Less than one	1%
One or two	2%
3-5	3%
6-10	7%
11-20	8%
21-30	6%
More than 30	11%
All my life	61%

How would you rate Philadelphia as a place to live?

Excellent	17%
Good	43%
Only fair	29%
Poor	11%

Do you think things in Philadelphia are generally headed in the right direction, or would you say that things are pretty seriously off on the wrong track?

Right direction	37%
Wrong track	45%
Mixed	15%
Don't know/refused	3%

All things considered, as a place to live, do you think Philadelphia has gotten better or worse than it was (five years ago or when you first moved in if you've been in the city less than five years), or has it stayed about the same?

Better	25%
Worse	37%
Same	34%
Some better/some worse	2%
Don't know/refused	1%

Thinking of the future, do you think Philadelphia will be better or worse as a place to live five years from now?

Better	52%
Worse	27%
Same	9%
Some better/some worse	4%
Don't know/refused	8%

Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the job Michael Nutter is doing as mayor?

Approve	39%
Disapprove	52%
Don't know/refused	9%

Do you approve or disapprove of the job the City Council is doing?

Approve	30%
Disapprove	57%
Don't know/refused	13%

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