



SPACE CITY PANEL



Insights from the Houston Metro Community Survey



Center for Public Policy

Hobby School of Public Affairs

Executive Summary

As part of a broader effort to understand public attitudes and community engagement in the Houston area, the University of Houston’s Hobby School of Public Affairs, in partnership with the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), launched the *Houston Metro Community Survey* in spring 2025.¹ Conducted between March 7 and May 7, the survey collected responses from 9,684 individuals across the nine-county Houston metropolitan statistical area (MSA). The primary goal of this survey was to assess how residents perceive the challenges and opportunities facing their communities, including household financial pressures, perceptions of public safety, political engagement, and concerns related to climate change and disaster preparedness. The survey also served as a recruitment tool for the **SPACE City Panel**, a long-term, longitudinal initiative to track shifts in community attitudes over time.

This report analyzes data from the Houston Metro Community Survey, offering a comprehensive view of how Greater Houston residents experience and respond to a rapidly evolving urban landscape. It focuses on four key areas: economic and household dynamics, community resiliency and safety, political outlook and civic trust, and overall quality of life concerns. By examining these domains across generations, racial and ethnic groups, gender, and geographic areas, the report identifies patterns of vulnerability, resilience, and engagement. These findings offer timely insights for policymakers, community leaders, and researchers working to understand and address the complex needs of one of the country’s most diverse and dynamic metropolitan regions.

The analysis revealed the following key findings:

- Economic experiences vary widely:

¹For more information, please visit <https://www.uh.edu/hobby/research/space-city-panel/>.

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- While 63.9% of respondents report living comfortably or having some financial cushion, 36% are either just meeting basic needs or falling short.
 - Financial anxiety remains high across income levels, with significant concern about inflation and personal debt.
 - Inflation and cost of living are top concerns:
 - Regardless of income or background, most respondents expressed concern about inflation and the rising cost of living. Even among those living comfortably, 70.1% were very or somewhat concerned about inflation and rising living costs.
 - There are noticeable generational and gender disparities in debt concern:
 - Younger generations—especially Gen X and Millennials—report higher concern about personal debt than older cohorts.
 - Women are more likely than men to express elevated worry about debt, with 28% of women saying they are “very concerned” compared to 23% of men.
 - Uncertainty about financial preparedness for natural disasters:
 - Over 40% of Gen X and Millennials say they are very worried about not having enough savings to recover from a natural disaster.
 - Concerns are disproportionately high among Black and Hispanic respondents compared white and Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) respondents.
 - Childcare and healthcare cost weigh on younger households:
 - Households with children under the age of 18—especially those with 1–4 minors—report high concern about childcare costs.
 - Healthcare costs are viewed as a major problem more often by Millennials and Gen Z than by older generations.
 - Public safety and crime are prominent community concerns:

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- Respondents who feel unsafe in their own neighborhoods are significantly more likely to consider crime a major problem for the city.
 - Women and residents in the City of Houston are less likely to feel safe during the day compared to men or those in suburban areas.
 - Views on climate change and racial injustice are politically polarized:
 - A plurality across all generations view climate change as a major issue, with concern slightly higher among younger cohorts.
 - A majority of Democrats (62.5%) view climate change as a major issue for Houston, compared to only 18.3% of Republicans.
 - On racial and social injustice, 54% of Democrats see it as a major problem, while 22% of Republicans say it is not a problem at all.
 - Political participation is mixed:
 - While 58.9% of respondents say they voted in the 2024 General Election, 27.6% did not. Over half of the respondents (51.7%) reported voting for Kamala Harris while 35.4% reported voting for Trump.
 - Partisan identity is weak for many:
 - Although voting trends reflect party alignment, nearly 30% of respondents say they identify with neither major party, and about 17% identify as independent.
 - Trust in government varies by level:
 - Confidence in the federal government is low, with 35.1% expressing no trust at all. State and especially city governments receive relatively higher levels of confidence across party lines.

Understanding the Community

1.1 Introduction

Capturing the everyday perspectives of residents across a sprawling and diverse region like the Houston Metropolitan Statistical Area (Houston MSA) requires more than broad national surveys or small focus groups. The Houston Metro Community Survey was designed as a foundational step toward building a more localized and responsive understanding of community conditions. Conducted across nine counties, this one-time survey gathered insights into how people experience daily life in their neighborhoods—economically, socially, and politically. In doing so, it offers an important standalone view of residents’ attitudes at a time of rapid regional change. This survey was a key part of our recruitment strategy to invite respondents to join the **SPACE City Panel**.² The recruitment survey opened on March 7, 2025, and remained active until May 7, 2025, during which time a total of 9,684 individuals from throughout the Houston MSA participated.

The survey results provide valuable insights into residents’ views on a range of important topics including economic conditions, politics, community resilience, and aspirations for the future. In the following chapters, the findings from the panel recruitment survey are presented in detail, highlighting key trends and differences across various communities within the Houston MSA. This broad outreach laid the groundwork for building a longitudinal panel that captures the diverse experiences and perspectives of Greater Houston’s population. The information collected through this survey offers a rich resource for researchers, policymakers, and community leaders aiming to better understand and address the region’s challenges and opportunities.

²See the full panel report for details here: <https://uh.edu/hobby/research/space-city-panel/intro/panel-intro.pdf>

1.2 Community Perspectives

In the heart of one of the United States' most diverse and rapidly growing regions, residents of the Houston MSA are navigating a complex landscape of economic uncertainty, public safety concerns, and shifting political attitudes—all while maintaining a deep investment in the future of their communities. This report offers insight of a diverse, complex, and evolving Houston area community. At a foundational level, the data highlight both resilience and vulnerability across households. While a significant portion of residents report living comfortably or having some financial cushion, a substantial share are only just meeting basic expenses—or falling short. This underscores the economic stratification within the region, where optimism about the future coexists with persistent anxieties about inflation, debt, and the rising cost of living.

The findings also reveal how deeply intertwined economic realities are with perceptions of safety, governance, and opportunity. Concerns about affordability, public safety, and access to resources extend beyond individual households to define how residents see the direction of their city and region. Political attitudes—reflected in views of elected officials, trust in government, and concern over social issues—suggest that residents in the Houston MSA are engaged and attentive, even when divided in political ideology. Taken together, these insights affirm that understanding Houston requires more than just economic indicators; it requires listening to how people experience and interpret the systems around them—from housing to healthcare to public trust.

1.3 Survey Participation and Respondent Demographics

The Houston Metro Community Survey was conducted from March 7 to May 7, 2025, and completed by 9,684 individuals. Respondents came from a wide range of neighborhoods, backgrounds, and household types, reflecting the demographic and geographic diversity of the region.³ While a portion of these respondents chose to enroll in the **SPACE City Panel** for ongoing participation, the broader recruitment survey sample itself provides critical insights into the current attitudes and

³Note: All frequencies and percentages are weighted for each figure and table throughout the report.

1.3. Survey Participation and Respondent Demographics

challenges facing Houston area residents. The geographic spread of participants highlights the regional reach of the study, with the majority residing in Harris County—including many within the City of Houston—and additional participation from surrounding counties such as Fort Bend, Montgomery, Brazoria, and others in the Houston MSA (Figure 1.1). The distribution of the population within the Houston MSA shows that the City of Houston accounts for the largest share at 38.2%. The rest of Harris County outside of the City of Houston represents about 26.4%, followed by Fort Bend County with 12.2%, and Montgomery County at 9.5%. The remaining 13.7% is spread across the remaining MSA counties (Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Galveston, and Waller).

Figure 1.1: Regional distribution of participants

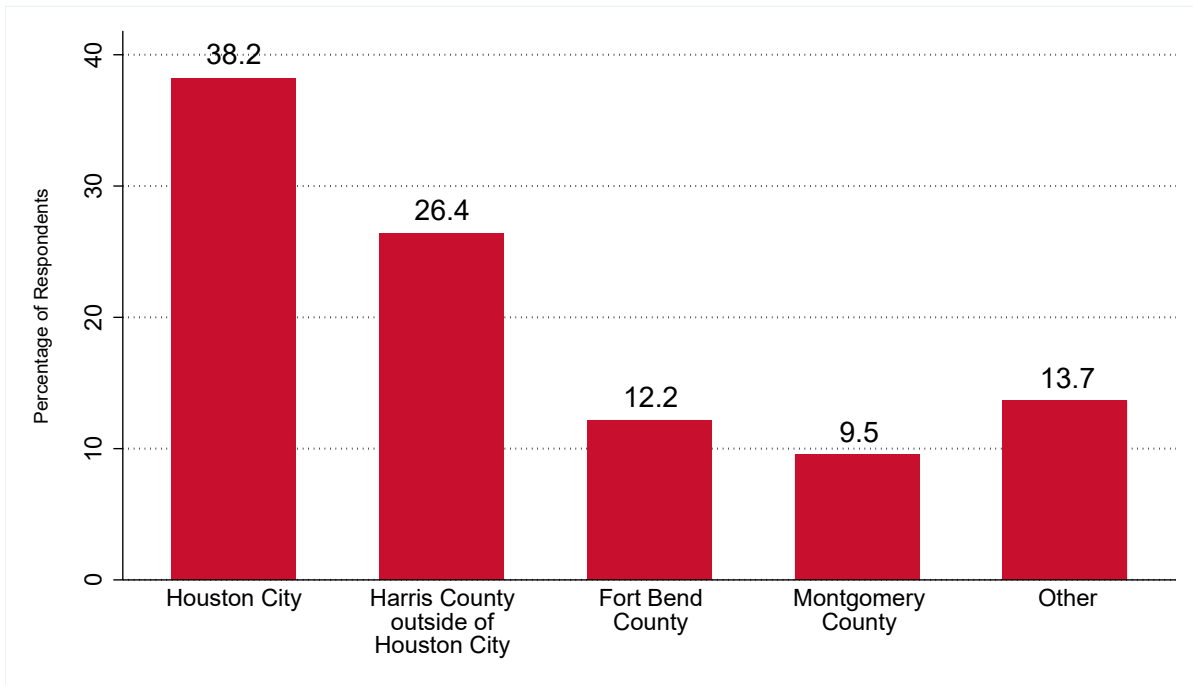


Table 1.1 examines the demographic breakdown by region and reveals important patterns across gender, race and ethnicity, age, and educational attainment in the Greater Houston area. Gender is fairly evenly distributed across all regions, with women comprising just over half of respondents in each area. The highest proportion of female respondents is in Fort Bend County (55.1%) and the lowest

1.3. Survey Participation and Respondent Demographics

in Montgomery County (51.3%), though the differences are modest overall.

Racial and ethnic composition varies significantly across the regions. The City of Houston stands out for its diversity, with 38.6% of respondents identifying as Hispanic, 23.5% as Black, and 23.1% as white. The rest of Harris County outside of the City of Houston also reflects this diversity, with the largest group being Hispanic (40.1%), followed by white (30.5%) and Black (15.5%) respondents. In contrast, Montgomery County is predominantly white (66.9%), with much smaller proportions of Hispanic (21.4%) and Black (4.3%) residents. Fort Bend County is one of the most racially diverse areas, with a large share of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) respondents (21.2%) alongside Hispanic (27.6%), Black (20.7%), and white (25.9%) residents. Other surrounding counties are majority white (55.1%), with smaller shares of Hispanic (26.1%) and Black (11.3%) residents.

Age distribution shows that most regions have a strong middle-aged presence. In the City of Houston, for example, 33.2% of respondents are between 35 and 54, while young adults (18–34) make up 28.3%. Fort Bend County and Montgomery County both skew slightly older, with over 40% of respondents age 55 and above. The rest of Harris County outside of the City of Houston and the surrounding counties have relatively even age distributions, though seniors (65+) are more prominent in the surrounding counties (22.2%).

Educational attainment varies meaningfully across regions. Fort Bend County has the highest proportion of college-educated respondents, with 21.9% holding a bachelor's degree and 23.2% holding a master's or professional degree. In contrast, the City of Houston has a greater share of respondents with only a high school diploma (28.9%) or some college but no degree (19.9%). Montgomery County and the rest of Harris County (non-City of Houston) both show higher levels of college completion than the city itself, but not as high as Fort Bend County. The surrounding counties display a mixed pattern, with roughly equal shares of residents holding high school diplomas, some college, or higher education degrees.

Overall, the table reveals a region rich in diversity and contrasts—urban areas like the City of Houston and Fort Bend County are demographically and educationally diverse, while outlying counties like Montgomery and others reflect a more homo-

1.3. Survey Participation and Respondent Demographics

geneous and slightly older population with moderate levels of college attainment.

Table 1.1: Demographics by region

	Houston City		Harris County outside Houston		Fort Bend County		Montgomery County		Other	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Gender										
Male	2,137	49.0	1,214	48.9	489	48.3	359	49.1	533	48.5
Female	2,225	51.0	1,268	51.1	523	51.7	371	50.9	565	51.5
Total	4,362	100.0	2,482	100.0	1,012	100.0	730	100.0	1,098	100.0
Age										
18-29	550	12.6	299	12.0	114	11.2	82	11.2	122	11.1
25-29	471	10.8	221	8.9	74	7.3	60	8.2	91	8.3
30-39	928	21.3	505	20.3	186	18.3	135	18.5	202	18.4
40-49	754	17.3	471	19.0	215	21.2	138	18.9	199	18.1
50-59	640	14.7	421	17.0	169	16.7	119	16.3	181	16.4
60-64	294	6.7	177	7.1	78	7.7	60	8.2	88	8.0
65 and older	725	16.6	388	15.6	177	17.5	136	18.7	216	19.7
Total	4,362	100.0	2,482	100.0	1,012	100.0	730	100.0	1,098	100.0
Race and Ethnicity										
White (Non-Hispanic)	1,008	23.1	792	31.9	256	25.3	434	59.4	548	49.9
Black (Non-Hispanic)	910	20.9	415	16.7	218	21.5	49	6.6	139	12.7
Hispanic	1,931	44.3	925	37.3	240	23.7	186	25.5	307	27.9
AAPI (Non-Hispanic)	376	8.6	222	8.9	243	24.0	32	4.4	69	6.3
Other (Non-Hispanic)	132	3.0	122	4.9	55	5.5	30	4.1	35	3.1
Skipped/Refused	6	0.1	6	0.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	4,362	100.0	2,482	100.0	1,012	100.0	730	100.0	1,098	100.0
Educational Attainment										
Less than High School	625	14.3	241	9.7	74	7.3	41	5.6	86	7.9
High School Diploma or GED	1,250	28.7	719	29.0	203	20.0	215	29.5	328	29.9
Some College, No Degree	667	15.3	524	21.1	171	16.9	136	18.7	242	22.0
Associate's Degree	363	8.3	247	10.0	108	10.6	77	10.6	124	11.3
Bachelor's Degree	747	17.1	458	18.5	215	21.2	159	21.8	184	16.7
Master's Degree	486	11.1	213	8.6	180	17.8	78	10.6	87	8.0
Doctorate or Professional Degree	216	4.9	78	3.1	62	6.1	23	3.1	46	4.2
Skipped/Refused	9	0.2	1	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	4,362	100.0	2,482	100.0	1,012	100.0	730	100.0	1,098	100.0

Note: Frequencies and percentages are weighted. Percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth.

Economics and Household Dynamics

This chapter explores the day-to-day financial realities of Houston MSA residents, examining how people perceive their economic situation in both relative and practical terms. Rather than focusing solely on hardship or crisis, the chapter highlights a broad spectrum of financial experiences—from those living comfortably to those struggling to meet basic needs. It also tracks changes in household income over the past year and expectations for the near future, offering a dynamic view of economic mobility—or lack thereof—across the region.

The results reveal how households are navigating core aspects of economic life, such as savings, employment, debt, and childcare expenses. Importantly, this chapter also extends beyond individual or household concerns to assess perceptions of economic conditions across the Greater Houston area. The findings suggest which issues—such as inflation, cost of living, or housing affordability—resonate most strongly as community-wide challenges and illuminate how economic pressures vary across different segments of the population.

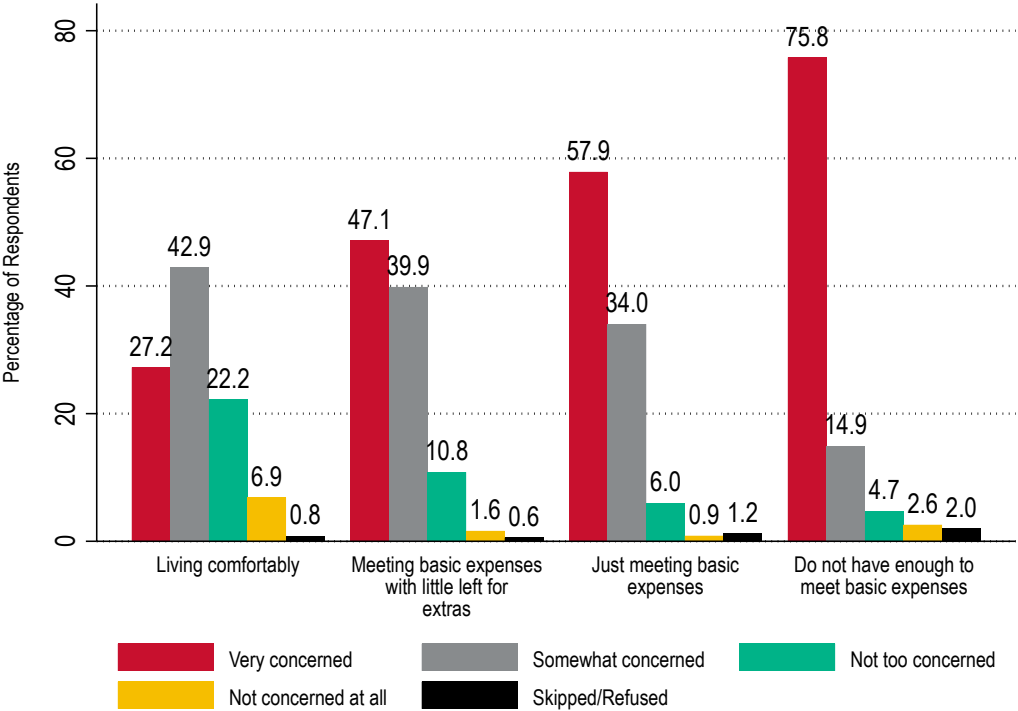
As seen in Table 2.1 below, 30.3% of respondents report living comfortably and 33.6% have money left over after meeting their basic expenses. It is encouraging that 63.9% of households are in a satisfactory economic position. However, the proportion of people who are just meeting their basic expenses (27.6%) or do not have enough to meet their expenses (8.4%) should concern local policy makers.

Table 2.1: How would you describe your household’s current financial situation?

	No.	%
Living comfortably	2,935	30.3
Meeting your basic expenses with a little bit left for extras	3,250	33.6
Just meeting your basic expenses	2,668	27.6
Do not have enough to even meet basic expenses	813	8.4
Skipped/Refused	18	0.2
Total	9,684	100.0

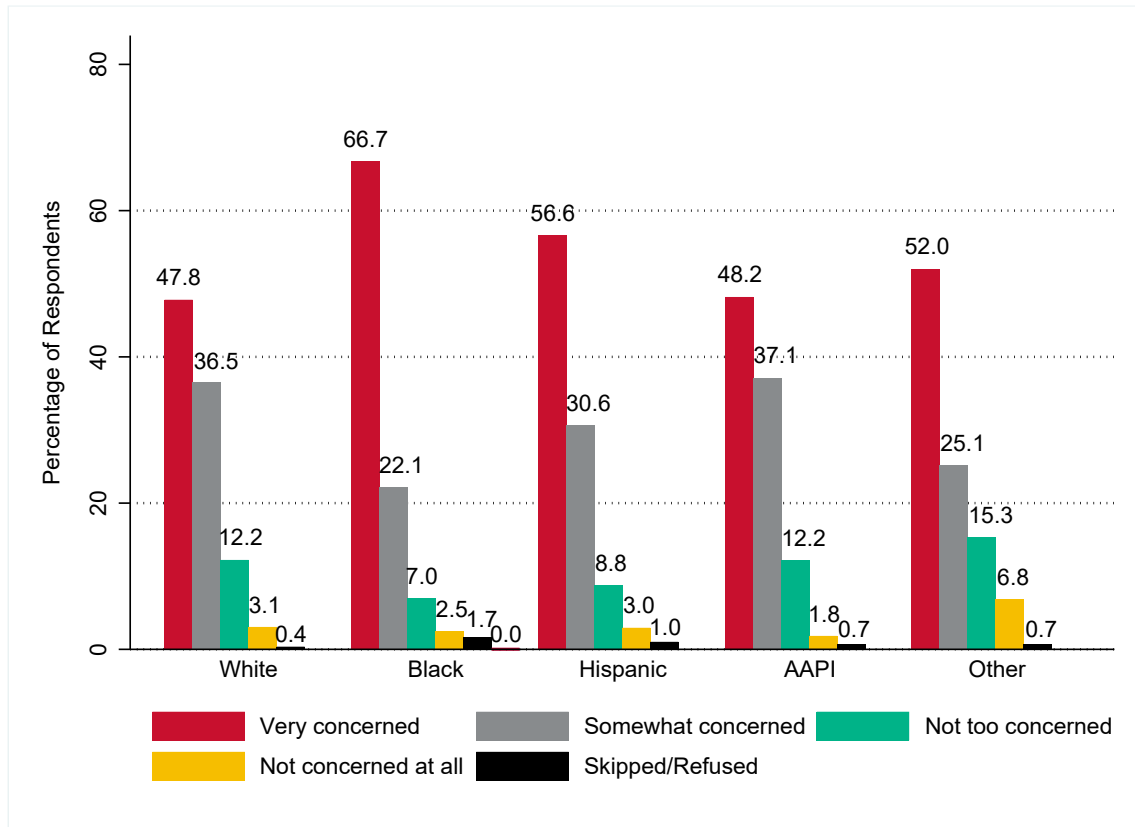
When financial situation is considered together with concern about the cost of living (see Figure 2.1), we see that respondents of all financial situations are concerned about the cost of living. Of those living comfortably, 27.2% are very concerned and 42.9% are somewhat concerned about the cost of living. Those living comfortably were the only group in which a substantial portion (29.1%) reported being not too concerned or not at all concerned about the cost of living.

Figure 2.1: Concern about cost of living and current financial situation



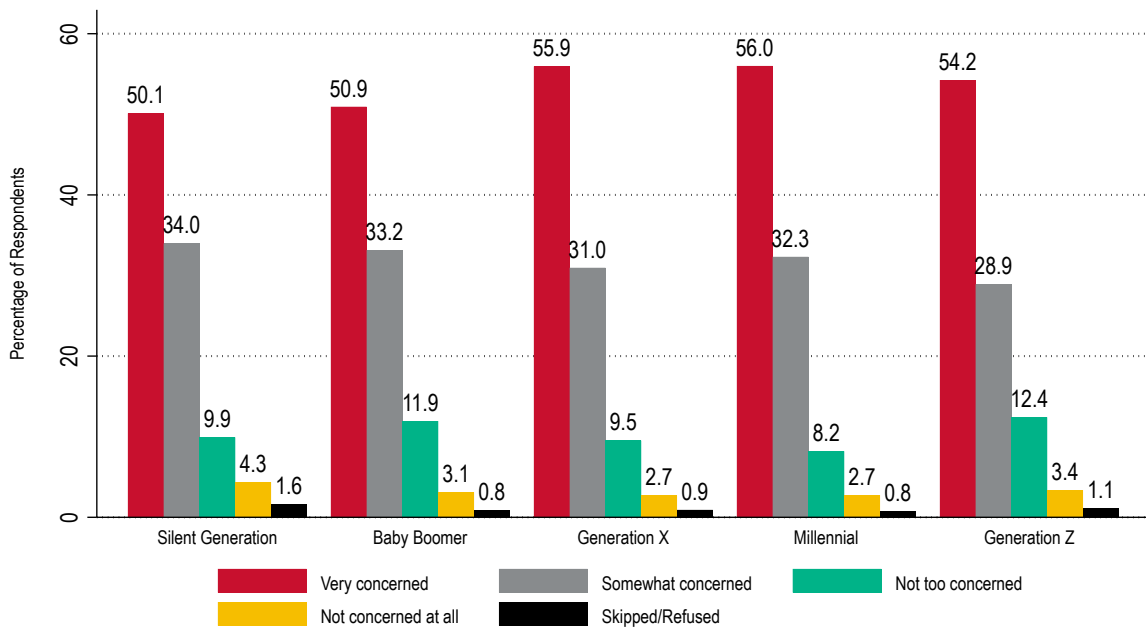
Related to the concern about the cost of living are respondents’ worries about inflation. Figure 2.2 shows the level of concern each racial or ethnic group has about inflation. We see that all racial and ethnic groups are concerned about inflation with most respondents being very or somewhat concerned. Black respondents have the highest proportion of respondents who are very concerned with 66.7%, followed by Hispanics with 56.6%.

Figure 2.2: Concern about inflation by race/ethnicity



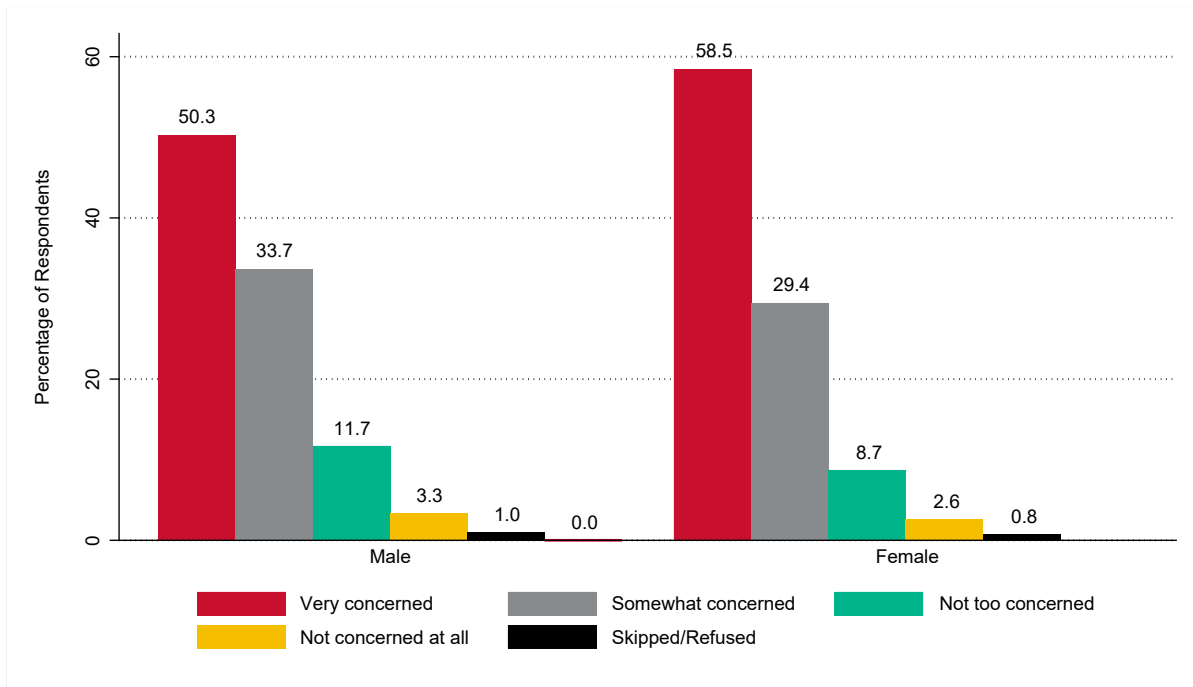
There is minimal difference in the level of concern about inflation when considered by generation. Figure 2.3 shows that the Silent Generation (born between 1928-1945) and Baby Boomer (born between 1946-1964) generations are slightly less concerned about inflation than the three younger generations. Fifty percent of the Silent and Baby Boomer generations are very concerned compared to 55.9% of Generation X (Gen X, born between 1965-1980), 56.0% of the Millennial cohort (born between 1981-1996), and 54.2% of Generation Z (Gen Z, born between 1997-2012).

Figure 2.3: Concern about inflation by age cohorts



Although a majority of both male and female respondents report being very concerned about inflation and their household's economic well-being, the level of concern is notably higher among female respondents (Figure 2.4). Specifically, 58.5% of women say they are very concerned about inflation, compared to 50.3% of men. Additionally, men are more likely than women to express being only somewhat concerned (33.7% vs. 29.4%) or not too concerned (11.7% vs. 8.7%). Very few respondents of either gender report being not concerned at all about inflation. These differences highlight that inflation-related economic anxiety is somewhat more pronounced among women in the region.

Figure 2.4: Concern about inflation by gender



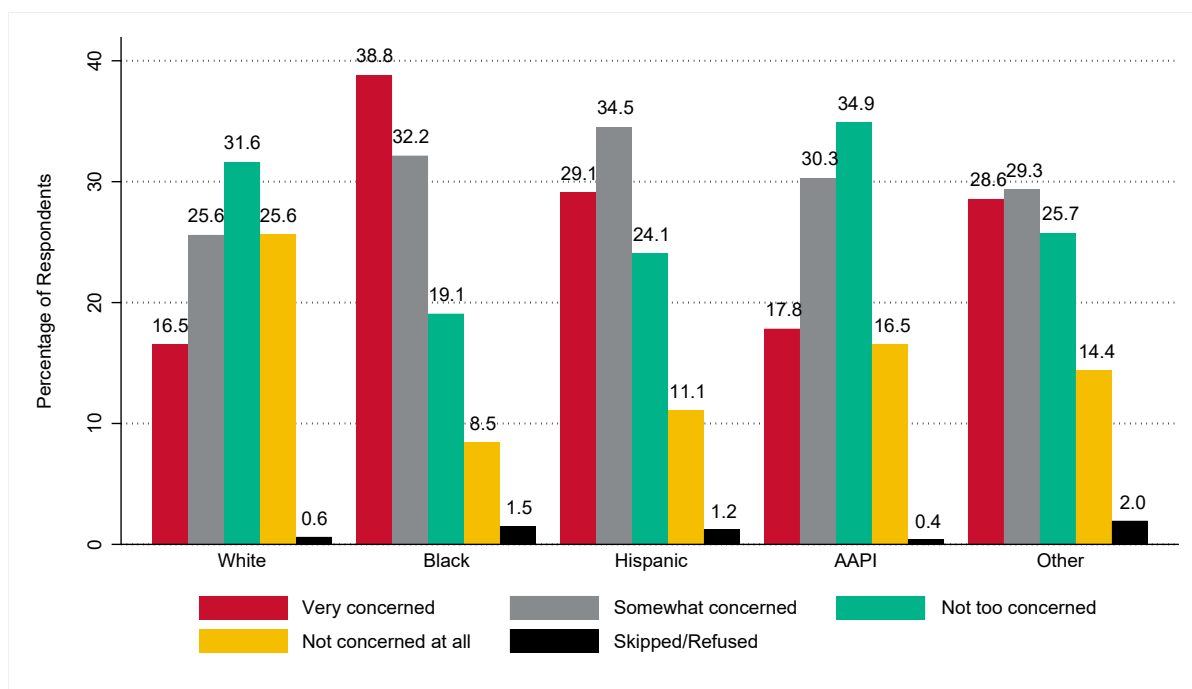
With the concerns households have about the cost of living and inflation, it should come as no surprise that personal debt, shown in Table 2.2, is also a concern. Although a lower percentage are very concerned about personal debt (25.6%), the percentage of very concerned and somewhat concerned combined is 56.1%.

Table 2.2: Thinking about your household’s economic well-being, how concerned are you that each of the following will impact your household finances in the next six months?: **Personal debt (e.g., credit cards, loans)**

	No.	%
Very concerned	2,475	25.6
Somewhat concerned	2,957	30.5
Not too concerned	2,595	26.8
Not concerned at all	1,557	16.1
Skipped/Refused	100	1.0
Total	9,684	100.0

When concern about personal debt is considered by racial and ethnic group we see that Black and Hispanic respondents have higher levels of concern compared to white respondents and members of the American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community (Figure 2.5). We find 38.8% of Blacks and 29.1% of Hispanics are very concerned about personal debt while 16.5% of whites and 17.8% of AAPI are very concerned.

Figure 2.5: Concern about personal debt by race/ethnicity



Concern about personal debt varies noticeably by generation, with younger respondents expressing higher levels of anxiety than older ones (Figure 2.6). Only 14.1% of the Silent Generation and 19.8% of Baby Boomers say they are very concerned about personal debt, compared to 23.7% of Gen Z, 28.0% of Gen X, and 29.3% of Millennials. In contrast, one-third of the Silent Generation (33.6%) report being not concerned at all—the highest of any group—while that number drops sharply among younger cohorts, with only 13.6% of Gen X, 11.1% of Millennials, and 15.6% of Gen Z reporting no concern. These patterns suggest that younger and middle-aged adults are carrying heavier financial burdens, likely tied to rising education costs, housing expenses, and other economic uncertainties, while the

relatively low levels of concern among older generations may reflect greater financial stability or reduced debt obligations in retirement. This generational gap in financial worry highlights the need for targeted policy interventions that address the economic challenges facing younger adults.

Figure 2.6: Concern about personal debt by generations

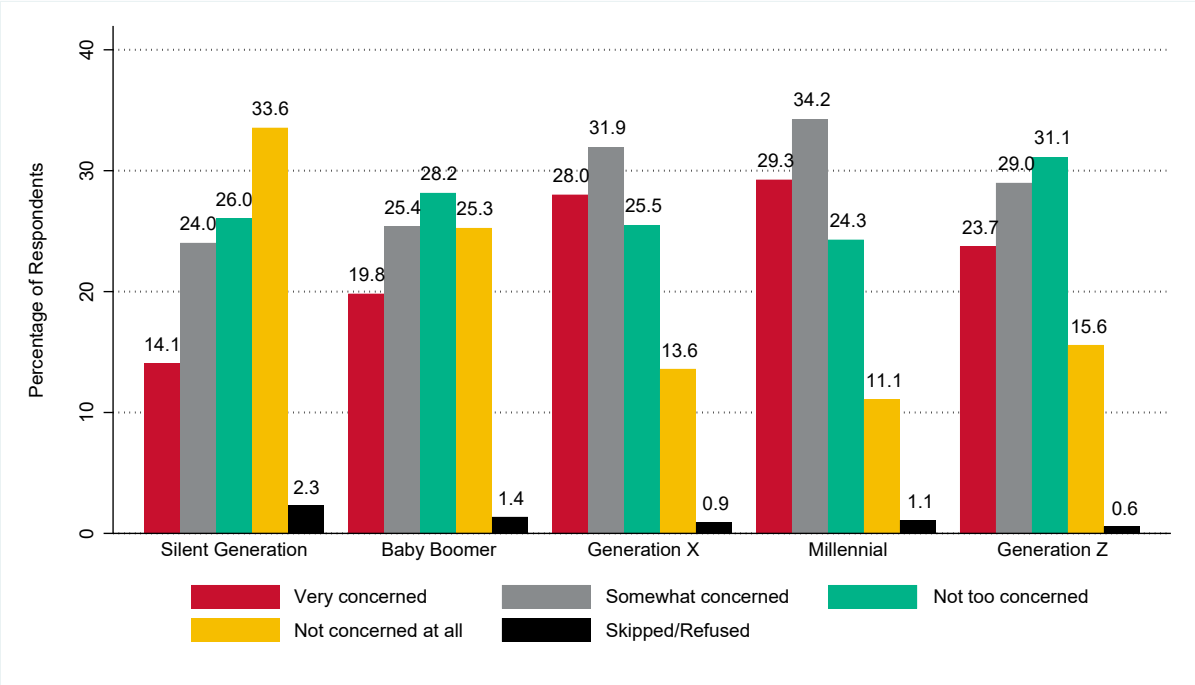
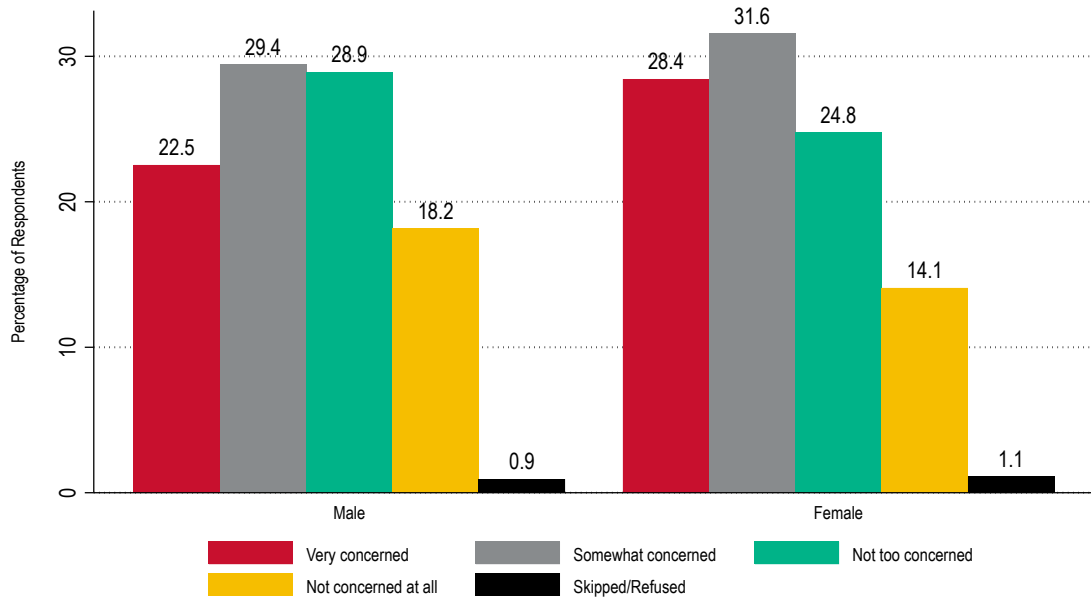


Figure 2.7 shows that men and women report different levels of concern about personal debt, such as credit card balances or loans. Women are more likely to express elevated concern, with 28.4% saying they are very concerned compared to 22.5% of men. Similarly, 31.6% of women report being somewhat concerned, slightly higher than the 29.4% of men who say the same. In contrast, men are more likely than women to express lower levels of concern with 28.9% saying they are not too concerned versus 24.8% of women. These differences suggest that personal debt weighs more heavily on women, with a greater proportion reporting higher levels of financial concern related to borrowing and repayment obligations.

Figure 2.7: Concern about personal debt by gender



Another measure of confidence in the economy asked respondents how concerned they are about their economic future in the next six months. In Figure 2.8, we see slight differences in concern between different racial and ethnic groups. Interestingly, Blacks have the second highest number of respondents who are very optimistic, 16.1% only behind other (16.7%).

Figure 2.8: Concern household economic future by race/ethnicity

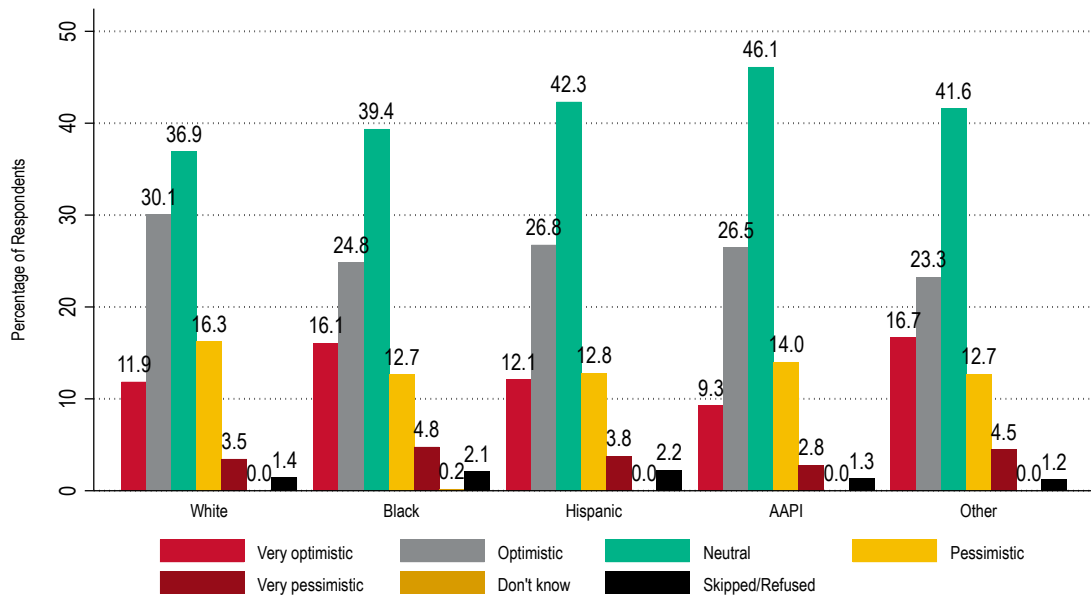
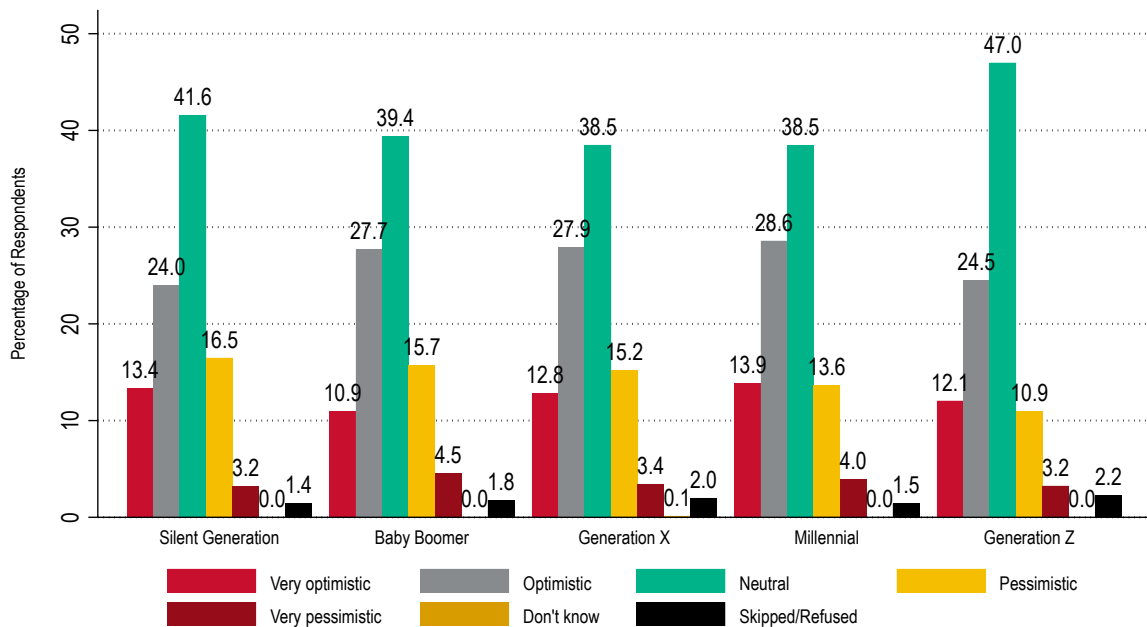


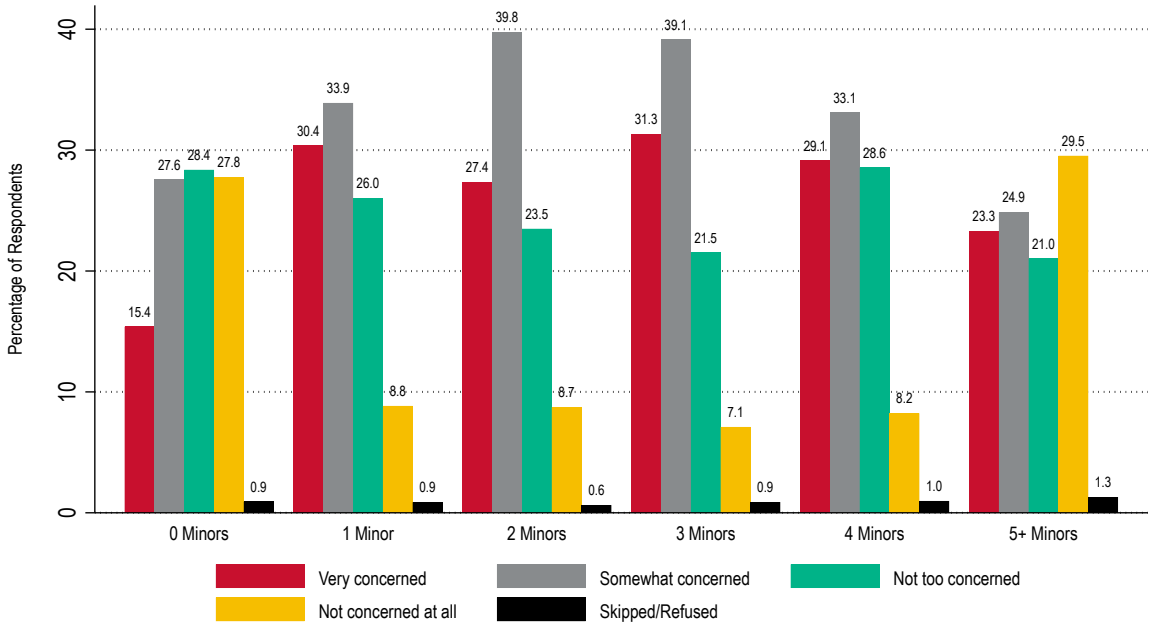
Figure 2.9 Shows the level of concern by generation. A plurality report feeling neutral about their future with more people reporting either being optimistic or very optimistic. Although there were sharp differences in concerns about personal debt, feelings about their economic future are more similar across generations.

Figure 2.9: Concern household economic future by age cohort



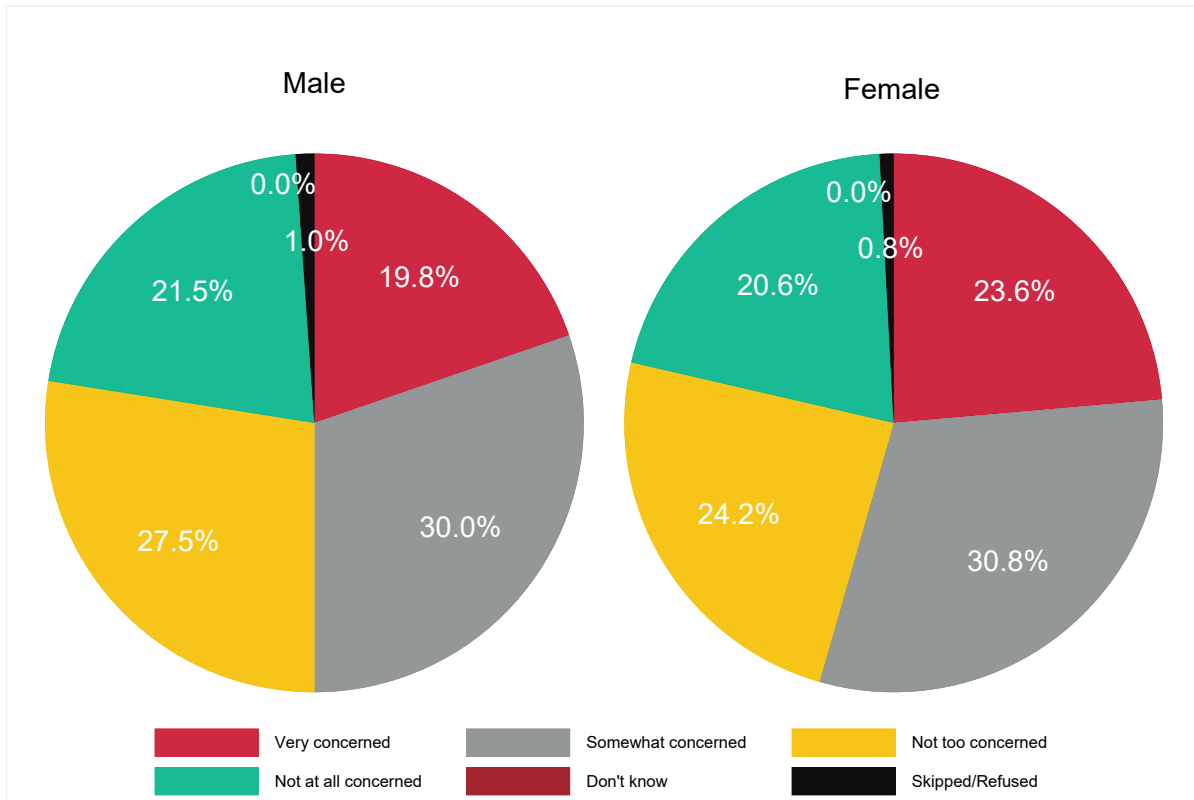
Family and childcare expenses are also an important factor in addressing household economic concerns. Figure 2.10 below breaks down the responses about how family responsibilities and childcare costs will impact household finances. Unsurprisingly, respondents with zero minors (i.e., those with no need for childcare) are not concerned; interestingly, however, respondents with five or more minors are similarly not concerned. As expected, the percentage of people ranking childcare as a serious concern jumps nearly 20 percentage points when comparing households with no minors and those with one minor. The proportion of respondents that are very concerned about childcare costs levels off after one minor. Still, the plurality of respondents with 2-4 minors in the household are somewhat concerned about the cost of childcare.

Figure 2.10: Level of concern regarding childcare costs by the number of minors residing within respondent household



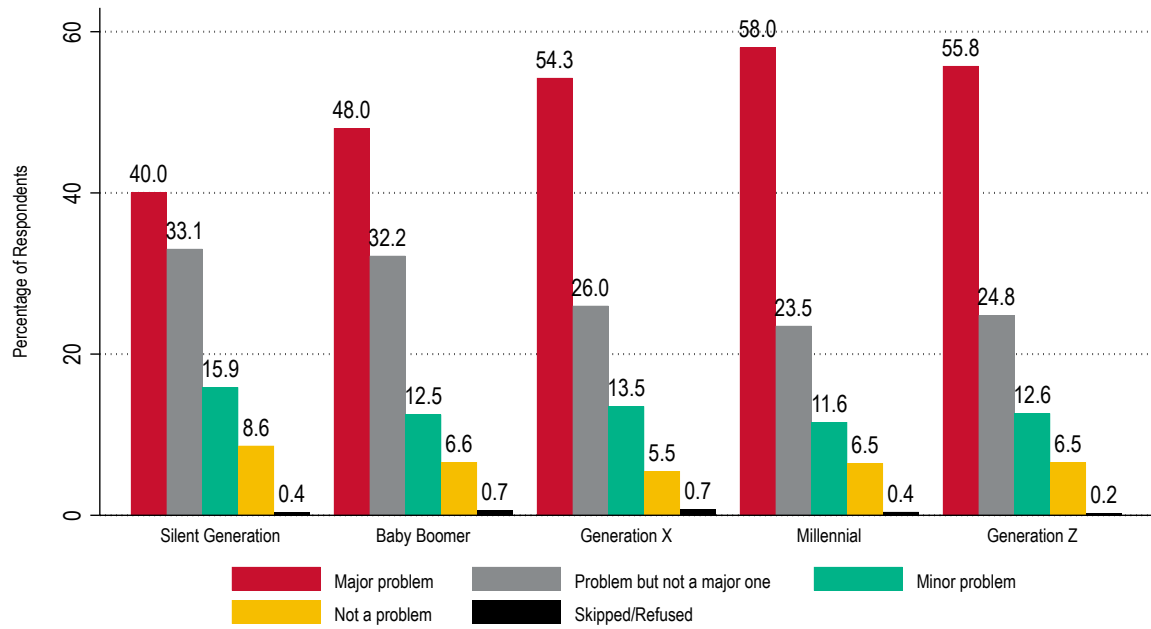
Concern about the financial impact of family responsibilities and childcare costs shows only modest differences between male and female respondents. Figure 2.11 shows that among women, 23.6% report being very concerned, compared to 19.8% of men. A similar share of men and women are somewhat concerned (30.0% and 30.8%, respectively), while men are slightly more likely to say they are not too concerned (27.5% vs. 24.2%) or not concerned at all (21.5% vs. 20.6%). These results suggest that while concern is widespread across genders, women are somewhat more likely to report heightened worry about how childcare and family responsibilities may impact their household finances in the near future.

Figure 2.11: Level of concern regarding childcare costs by gender



Finally, another area of concern for the Houston area is healthcare access and affordability (Figure 2.12). A majority of respondents from the three younger generations see access and affordability as a major problem for the Houston area. While the Silent and Baby Boomer generations are less likely to see access and affordability as a major problem, two-fifths or more of older respondents still see it as a major problem.

Figure 2.12: Healthcare access and affordability by age cohort



Community Resiliency, Safety, and Climate Risks

The survey also explored how residents perceive risk and resilience in their everyday environments—ranging from personal and neighborhood safety to household preparedness in the face of natural disasters and climate-related threats. The data offer insight into both the psychological and logistical readiness of communities across the Greater Houston area, which is especially important in a region frequently exposed to severe weather events, infrastructure stress, and evolving environmental challenges.

3.1 Disaster Preparedness and Financial Resilience

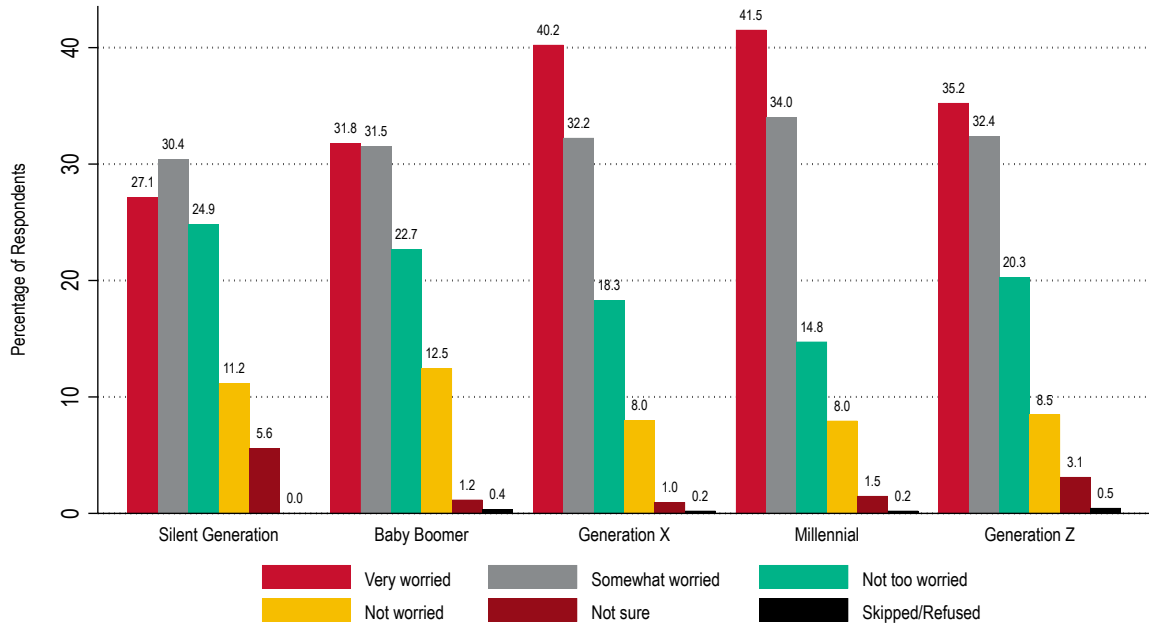
Figure 3.1 shows that concern about having sufficient financial savings to weather a natural disaster is highest among Gen X and Millennials. Over two-fifths of both groups report being very worried—40.2% for Gen X and 41.5% for Millennials—far exceeding the Silent Generation (27.1%) and Baby Boomers (31.8%). Elevated concern among Gen X and Millennials may reflect their greater financial responsibilities, such as mortgages, dependents, and accumulated assets that would be costly to replace in the event of a disaster. In contrast, older generations may feel more secure due to more established savings or home equity, reducing their perceived vulnerability.

Meanwhile, Gen Z expresses relatively less concern, with only 35.2% reporting they are very worried and 8.5% saying they are not worried at all, the highest "not worried" percentage of any group. Relatively less concern among Gen Z respondents may reflect the fact that they are younger adults who rent rather than own property and may have fewer financial obligations or assets at risk. Their lower financial exposure could contribute to a greater sense of resilience or

3.1. Disaster Preparedness and Financial Resilience

detachment from disaster-related financial concerns.

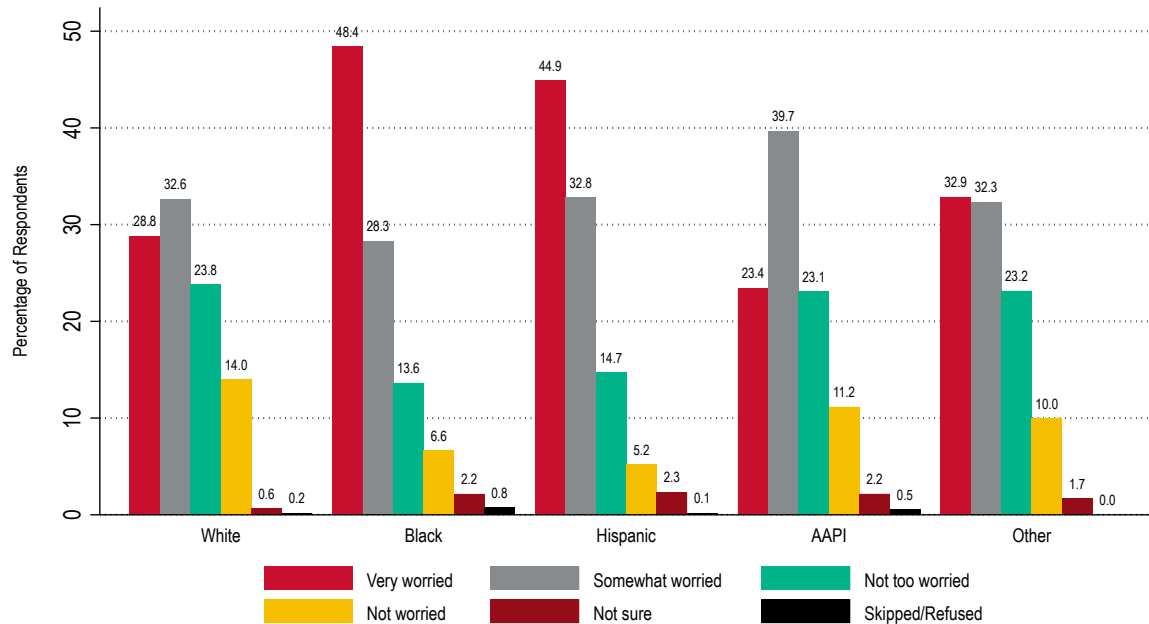
Figure 3.1: Level of concern regarding sufficient financial savings to withstand a natural disaster by age cohort



Similarly, Figure 3.2 displays the same concern about having sufficient financial savings to weather a natural disaster, but evaluates responses across race and ethnicity. Black and Hispanic respondents have the highest proportion of respondents who are very worried about the costs after a natural disaster (48.4% and 44.9%, respectively). The top selection for white and AAPI respondents is "somewhat worried" (39.7%). Further investigation is required to determine whether white and AAPI respondents reside in areas that face less risk from natural disasters, simply have more money in savings, or if the difference can be attributed to an overall racial wealth gap.

3.1. Disaster Preparedness and Financial Resilience

Figure 3.2: Level of concern regarding sufficient financial savings to withstand a natural disaster by race/ethnicity



Another important comparison is how concern about climate change relates to financial preparedness for a natural disaster. Figure 3.3 contrasts the level of concern about climate change against personal financial savings to recover from potential natural disasters. Almost half of respondents (47.8%) that consider climate change a major problem for the Houston area are also very worried about their ability to withstand financially to a natural disaster. It drops significantly when respondents rank climate change as not a problem at all, falling to only 21.9% of respondents who are very worried about financially recovering from a natural disaster.

3.1. Disaster Preparedness and Financial Resilience

Figure 3.3: Level of concern regarding sufficient financial savings to withstand a natural disaster by level of worry about climate change

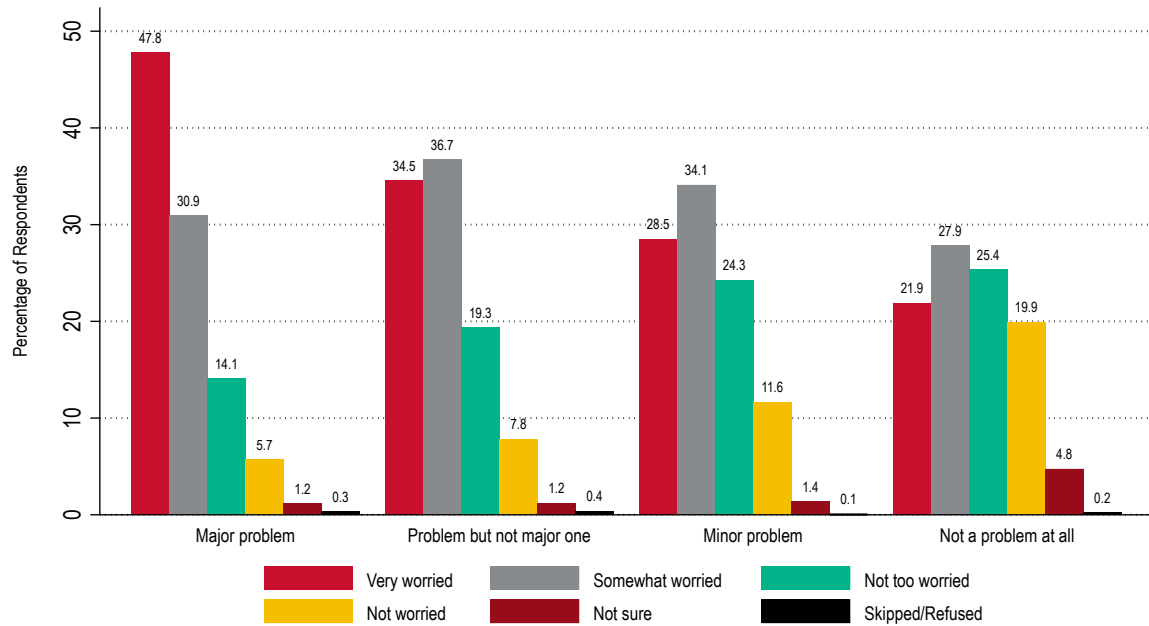
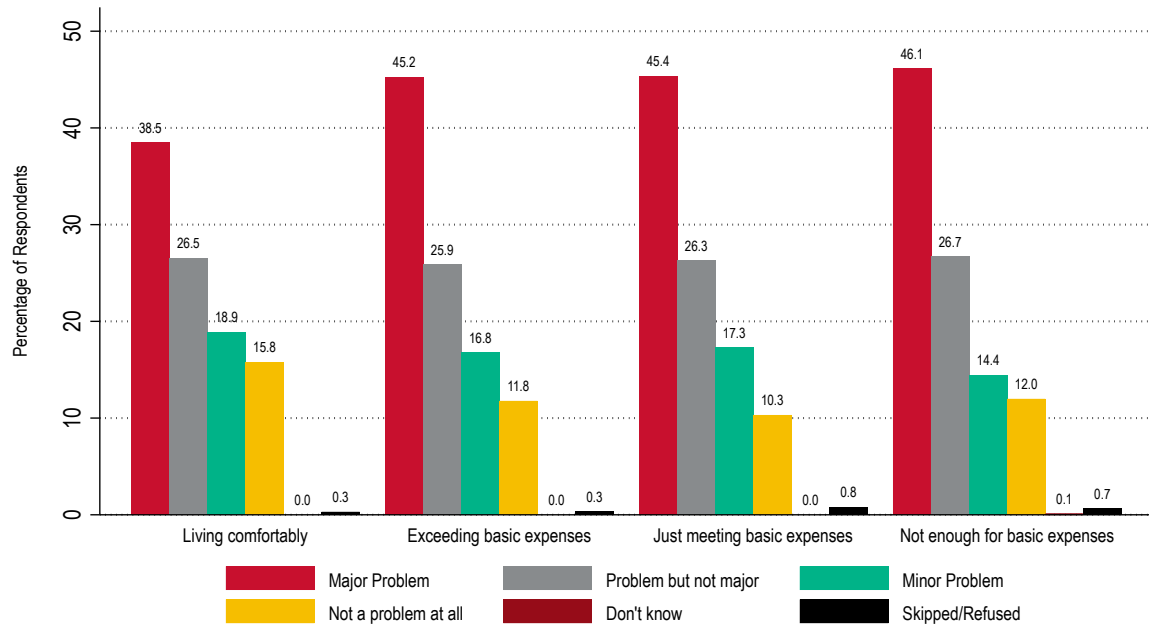


Figure 3.4 shows how respondents with different rates of household financial stability rank climate change as a problem. Those with enough financial stability to live comfortably are the least concerned about climate change with 38.5% of respondents rating it a major problem. Households with less financial stability have between 45.2% and 46.1% of respondents identifying climate change as a major problem for the Houston area. Households with more money may not be as concerned because they can withstand the occasional financial hit to rebuild after a natural disaster, or they may live in neighborhoods more insulated from the impacts of climate change.

Figure 3.4: How serious individuals rank climate change as a major issue in Houston by how household financially stability



3.2 Crime and Public Safety

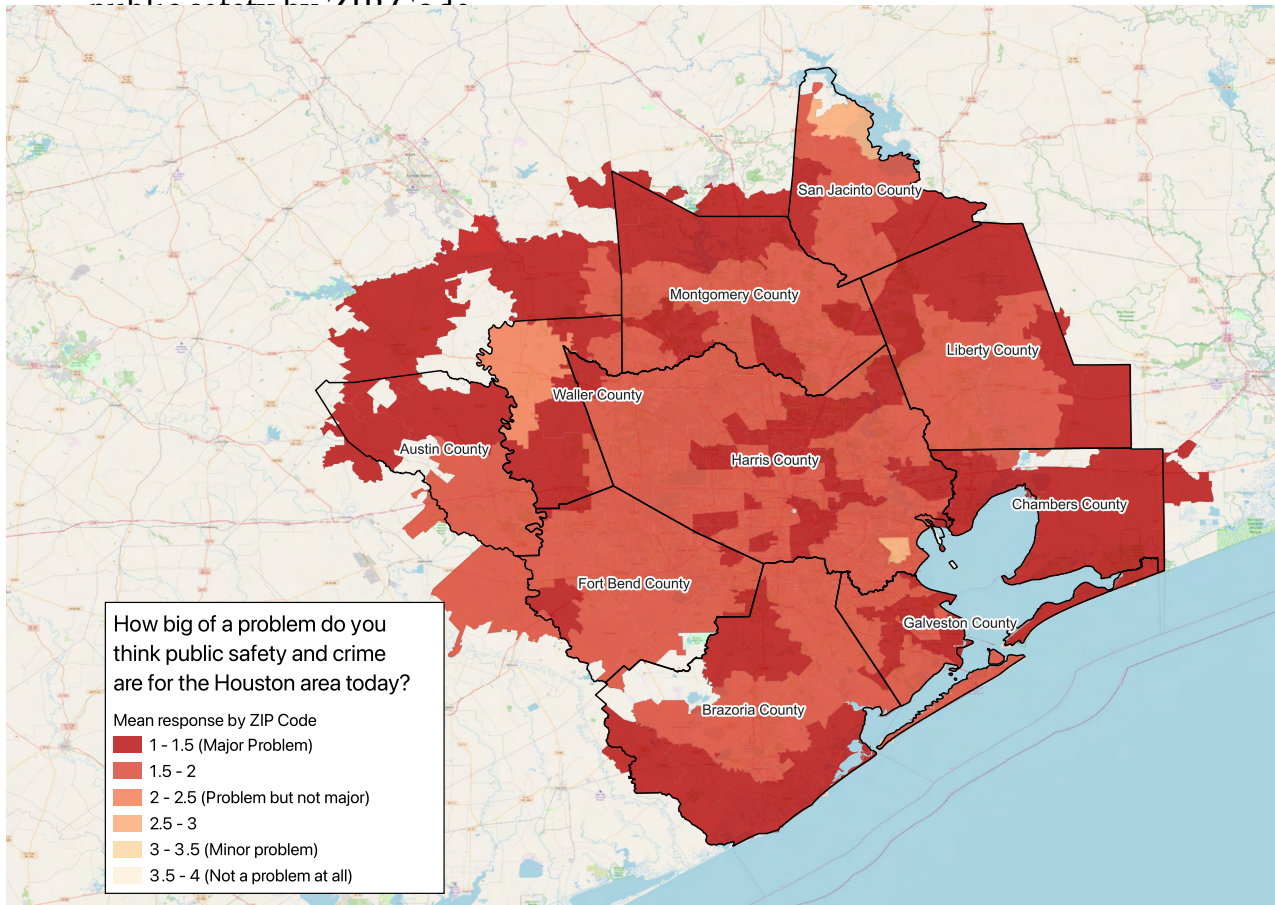
Public safety and crime are top-of-mind issues for many Greater Houston residents. This section analyzes perceptions of crime and safety based on several survey questions, beginning with broad city-level concerns before examining more localized, neighborhood-specific experiences. It explores geographic, gender, and personal safety differences to better understand how safe Houstonians feel both in the wider region and within their own neighborhoods. To begin, respondents were asked how big of a problem they believe crime and public safety is in the Houston area. A strong majority (56.8%) view it as a major problem. Another 29.1% consider it a problem, though not a major one. Smaller shares see it as a minor problem (10.0%) or not a problem at all (3.7%). These findings highlight that nearly 86% of respondents believe crime and public safety are at least somewhat problematic in the Houston area.

The responses with respect to an individual's assessment of safety within their neighborhood indicate regional differences between rural and urban locations, despite more consistent agreement across all MSA regions that crime is a problem for Houston, in general. This presents a potential inconsistency in which some respondents feel safe from crime at home, while also considering it a top-of-mind issue.

The majority of respondents in each region consider crime a major problem, ranging from 52.7% (Montgomery County) to 58.6% (Harris County, not including the City of Houston). Although the rate is marginally higher in the City of Houston and Harris County, the greater divergence between rural and urban areas is evident when respondents answer about their own neighborhoods.

The map in Figure 3.5 shows the mean response by ZIP Code of how respondents rank crime and public safety as a major issue in Houston. The entire Houston MSA ranks crime as a problem to varying degrees. No ZIP Codes ranked crime as "not a problem at all" and only a few ZIP codes ranked it as a "minor problem" facing Houston. The majority of the region falls between major problem and a problem but not a major one. Fort Bend County almost uniformly ranks crime as a problem, with a pocket in the west leaning toward a major problem. The parts of Harris County that are most concerned with crime as a major issue are concentrated more centrally around the downtown areas. The western edge of the county is less concerned with crime and public safety as a major problem.

Figure 3.5: Geographic representation of mean respondent's ranking of crime and public safety by ZIP Code.



When respondents are asked whether or not they felt safe to be alone in their neighborhoods during the day, over 60% of respondents in the suburban counties of Fort Bend and Montgomery agree it is safe in their neighborhoods. Only 38.1% of respondents in the City of Houston completely agree it is safe to go out alone in their neighborhood. The results for Harris County outside of the City of Houston fall between urban and rural results, with 48.9% completely agreeing. Crime remains a potent political issue despite falling back to historic lows in most of the country after an uptick during the COVID pandemic. Future research could compare the measured rates of reported crimes with people's opinions of crime to evaluate if perception is matching the reality.

The map in Figure 3.6 shows the mean response by ZIP Code when asked to reflect on their personal safety within their neighborhood. The map helps to visualize

3.2. Crime and Public Safety

the rural and urban divide. A majority of the Houston region falls between feeling neutral and agreeing that it is safe to go out in their neighborhoods alone during the day. The downtown area and the surrounding areas to the north, east, and south lean toward disagreement, suggesting a greater concern about safety in those areas. These results stand in contrast to Figure 3.5, whereas the majority of respondents view crime as a major problem in the Houston area (57%), the majority of respondents also agree or strongly agree that their own neighborhoods are safe during the day (73%) and at night (52%).

Figure 3.6: Geographic representation of mean respondent's ranking of personal safety within neighborhood by ZIP Code

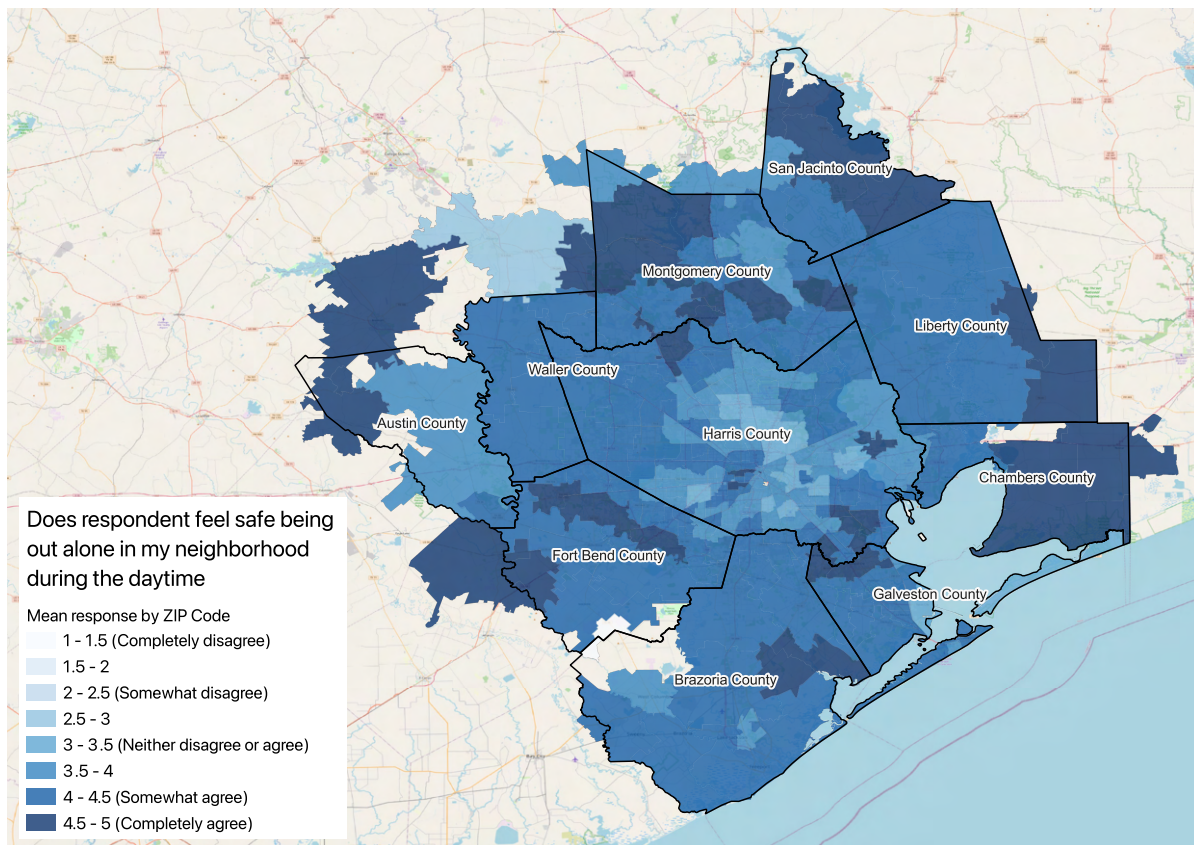
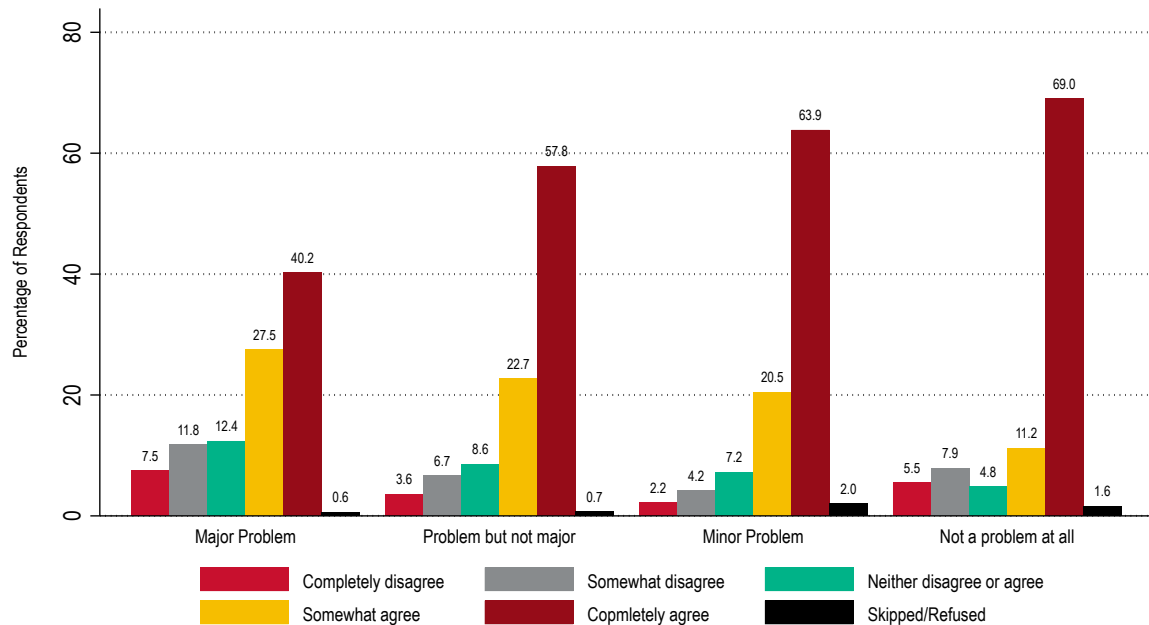


Figure 3.7 contrasts responses to these two questions: (1) How serious do individuals rank crime and public safety as a major issue in the Houston area and (2) If the respondent feels safe being out alone in their neighborhood during the day. Those who view crime as a major problem in the Houston area are also the least comfortable going out alone in their neighborhood during the day. Only 40.2% of

3.2. Crime and Public Safety

these respondents feel safe going out alone during the day compared to 69.0% of respondents who do not believe crime in the Houston area is a problem at all.

Figure 3.7: Perceptions of crime and public safety in Houston by feelings of neighborhood safety during the day



Beyond geography, perceptions of crime and safety also vary significantly by gender. The following figures explore how male and female respondents evaluate both citywide crime levels and their personal sense of safety during the day, revealing meaningful disparities in experience and concern. Figures 3.8 and 3.9 reveal a disparity between how male and female respondents perceive crime and safety. The majority of both genders, 62.3% of female respondents and 51.0% of male respondents, rank crime as a major problem in the Houston area, but with a similar gap as in the previous question. The difference between male and female respondents between the first and second questions is 9.7 percentage points and 11.3 percentage points, respectively. Most of the male respondents, 53.6%, feel safe going out alone in their neighborhood during the day, while only 43.9% of the female respondents do so.

3.2. Crime and Public Safety

Figure 3.8: How serious individuals rank crime and public safety as a major issue in Houston by gender

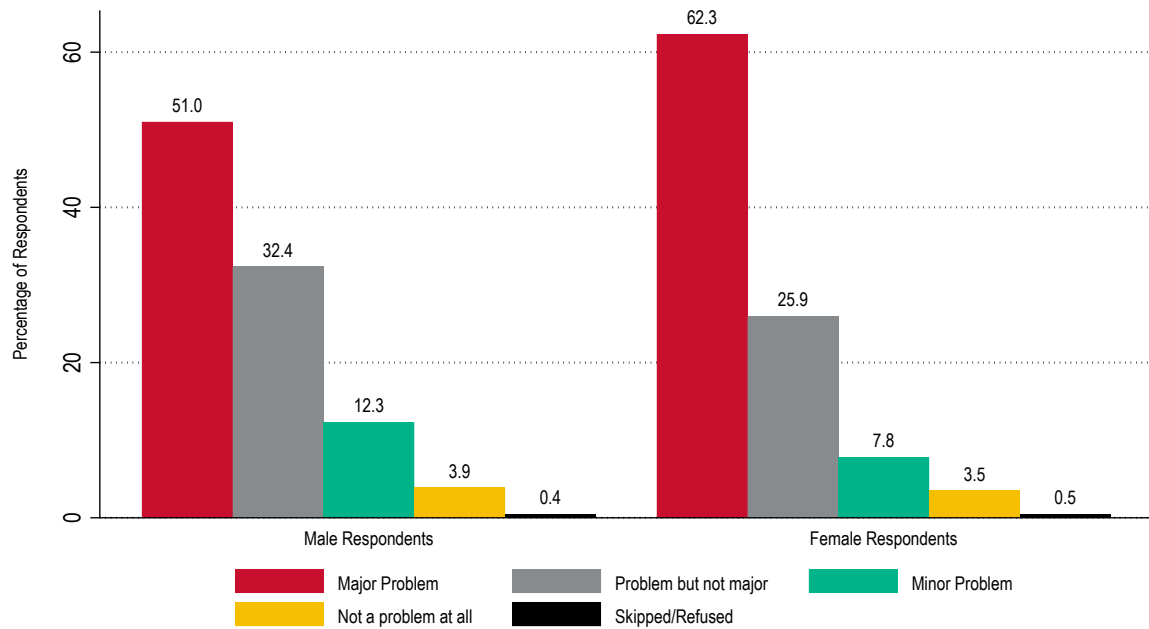
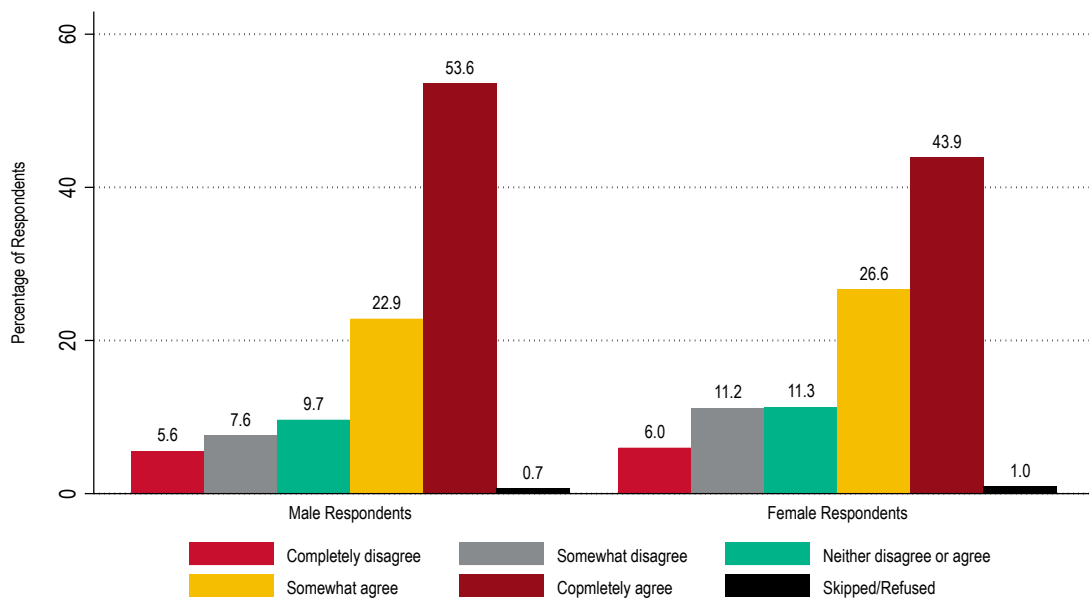


Figure 3.9: If respondent feels safe being out alone in their neighborhood (daytime) by gender

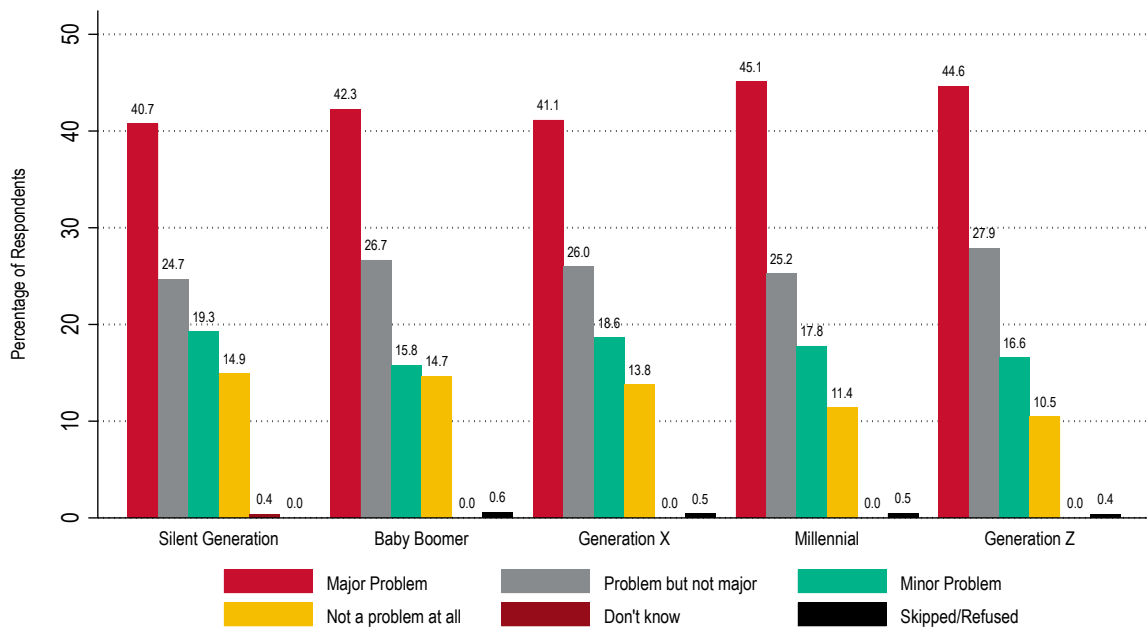


3.3 Climate Change Perceptions

Climate change presents both environmental and economic risks to the Houston area, a region already vulnerable to hurricanes, flooding, and extreme heat. As such, residents’ perceptions of the seriousness of climate change are an important part of understanding broader community resilience.

Concern about climate change is shared across age groups, with only slight variation by generation. Figure 3.10 shows how seriously various generations take climate change. The responses are relatively consistent across all age ranges. The proportion of each generation ranking climate change as a major problem falls between 40% and 45%. There is a slight uptick in concern when evaluating only the younger generations, as both Millennial and Generation Z respondents hover around 45%.

Figure 3.10: How big of a problem climate change is for Houston by age cohort

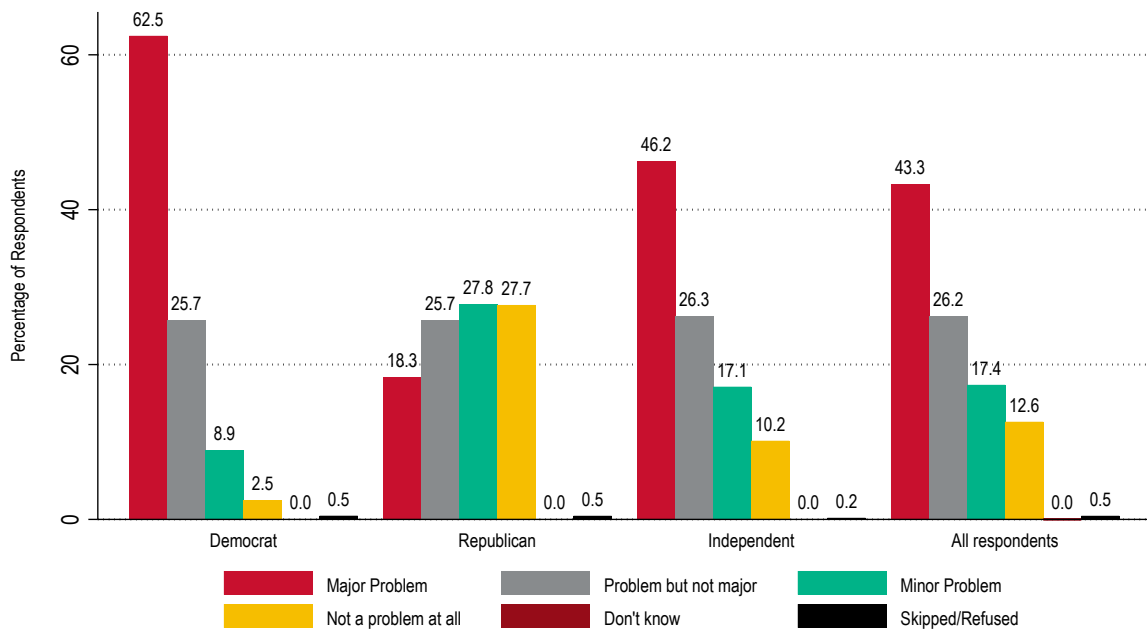


The survey also confirmed that climate change remains a politically polarized issue. Figure 3.11 shows how each political party ranks climate change as an issue facing the Houston area today. The disparity in the rate of Democrats considering climate

3.3. Climate Change Perceptions

change a major problem and Republicans who feel the same is dramatic, at 62.5% of Democrats compared to 18.3% of Republicans. Ranking climate change as a major problem is the selection of the majority and plurality among Democrats and Independents, respectively. It is the least popular option among Republican respondents, and they remain equally split among the other levels of concern.

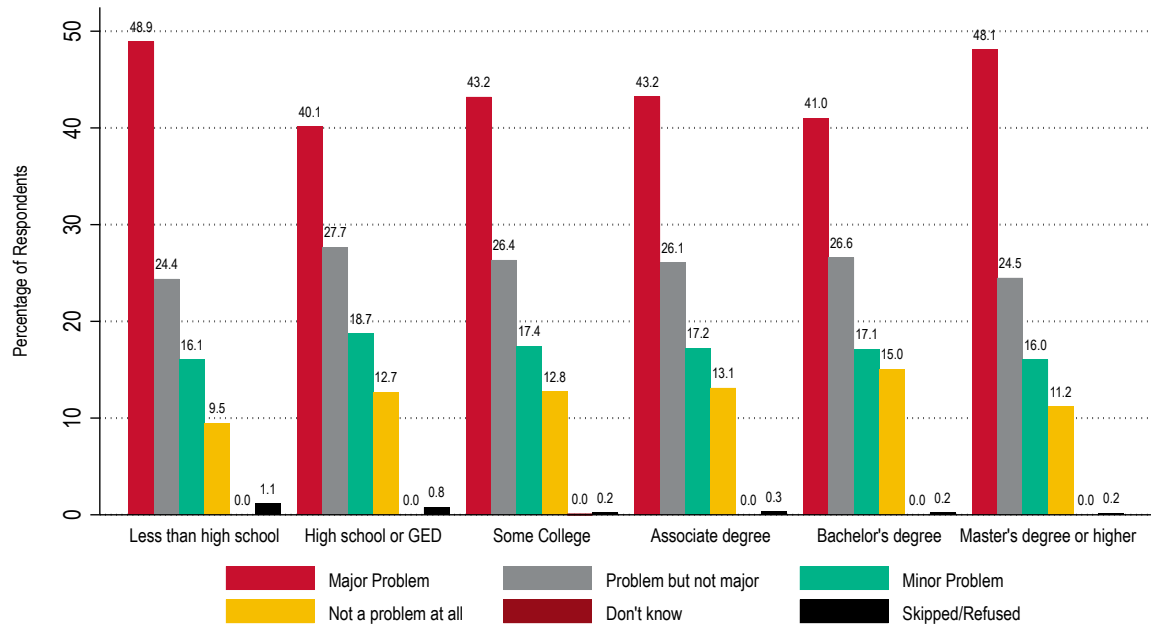
Figure 3.11: How big of a problem climate change is for the Houston area by party ID



Finally, Figure 3.12 depicts how educational attainment relates to opinions about climate change. Ranking climate change as a major problem is the top selection across every level of education. Conventional wisdom suggests that an increase in educational attainment is correlated with an increase in the level of concern for environmental causes. However, almost half of respondents, 48.9%, that have not finished high school ranked climate change as a major problem. That is the highest rate for all the education levels. That value falls to between 40% and 43% for each subsequent education cohort, before increasing again to over 48% for respondents with a master’s degree or higher.

3.3. Climate Change Perceptions

Figure 3.12: How big of a problem climate change is for Houston by educational attainment



Politics

In addition to economic concerns and community resiliency, the Houston Metro Community Survey assessed civic engagement, political identity, policy concerns, and confidence in government. Participants were asked about past voting behavior, candidate preferences, and evaluations of prominent elected officials at the local, state, and national levels. These responses offer insight to political leanings and participation among Houston area residents as well as how residents' confidence and trust in political institutions, from their own municipalities to the federal government. It also included assessments of key policy issues facing the region, such as climate change and racial injustice.

Voter turnout in the Houston area generally reflects broader national patterns, as shown in Table 4.1. A majority of respondents, 58.9%, reported that they were sure they voted in the November 2024 General Election, indicating a solid level of electoral participation within the surveyed population. However, a significant portion—nearly two-fifths (38.5%)—did not cast a ballot. Specifically, 27.6% indicated that they did not vote at all, while an additional 6.4% thought about voting but ultimately did not, and 4.5% who usually vote chose not to participate in this particular election.

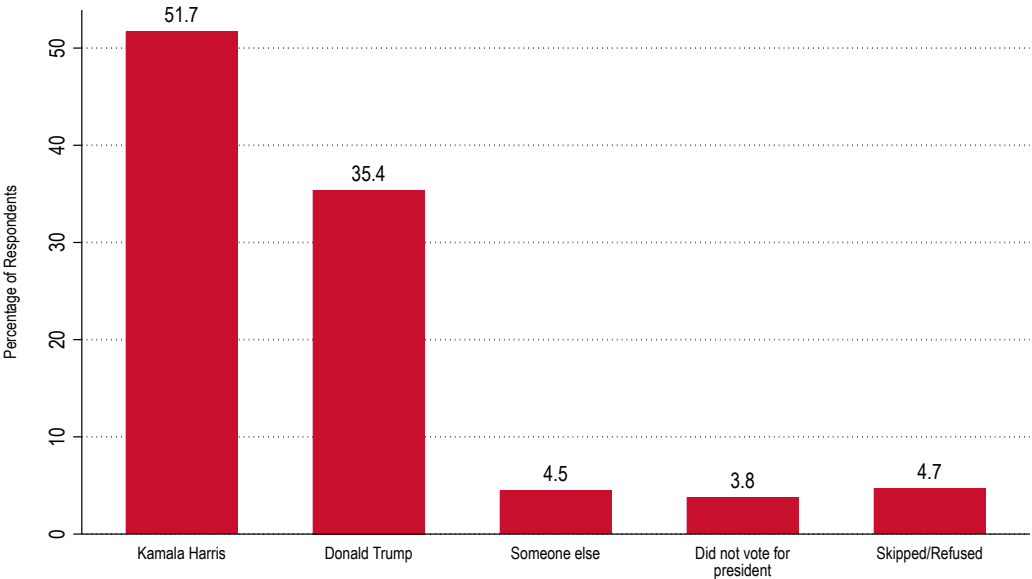
Table 4.1: As it relates to the General Election that occurred this past November 2024, which one of the following statements best describes you?

	No.	%
I did not vote in the November 2024 General Election.	2,670	27.6
I thought about voting in the November 2024 General Election, but I did not.	621	6.4
I usually vote, but I did not in the November 2024 General Election.	436	4.5
I'm sure I voted in the November 2024 General Election.	5,702	58.9
Skipped/Refused	255	2.6
Total	9,684	100.0

Figure 4.1 shows that of those who voted in the November 2024 presidential election, a majority (51.7%) said they voted for Kamala Harris compared to 35.4% who reported voting for Donald Trump. A small percentages of respondents (3.8%)

indicated that they did not vote in the 2024 presidential election or voted for someone other than the two major party candidates (4.5%).

Figure 4.1: Did you vote in the 2024 presidential election for Kamala Harris, Donald Trump, or someone else?



Interestingly, while many respondents reported voting for major party candidates, a significant portion do not strongly identify with either the Democratic or Republican parties (see Table 4.2). Only about one-quarter of the surveyed individuals consider themselves Democrats (25.6%) or Republicans (25.3%), reflecting a relatively balanced partisan self-identification among those two groups. However, nearly one-third of respondents (29.2%) stated that they do not affiliate with any political party, indicating a large segment of the population that may be politically independent or disengaged from traditional party labels. An additional 17.3% identified as Independents, further emphasizing the prevalence of nonpartisan or cross-partisan perspectives within the community. Very few respondents were uncertain of their party identification or declined to answer, underscoring that this distribution likely reflects genuine political attitudes rather than confusion or non-response.

Table 4.2: Do you consider yourself a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or none of these?

	No.	%
Democrat	2,483	25.6
Republican	2,445	25.3
Independent	1,676	17.3
None of these	2,829	29.2
Don't know	2	0.0
Skipped/Refused	248	2.6
Total	9,684	100.0

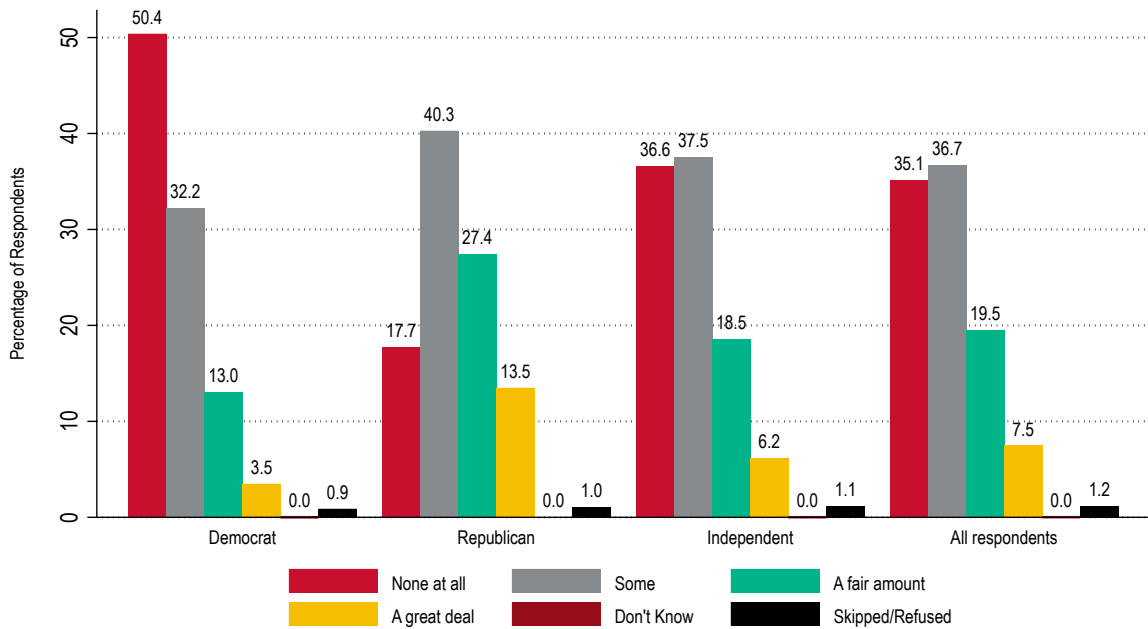
Reflecting broader attitudes toward government, Table 4.3 shows that there is little confidence in the federal government among Houston MSA residents. While 36.7% report having some confidence, a close 35.1% say they have none at all, and only 7.5% express a great deal of confidence. This widespread skepticism suggests a general mistrust of federal institutions, which may influence how residents engage politically and view government effectiveness.

Table 4.3: How much confidence do you have in the **federal** government?

	No.	%
None at all	3,403	35.1
Some	3,555	36.7
A fair amount	1,888	19.5
A great deal	723	7.5
Don't know	3	0.0
Skipped/Refused	112	1.2
Total	9,684	100.0

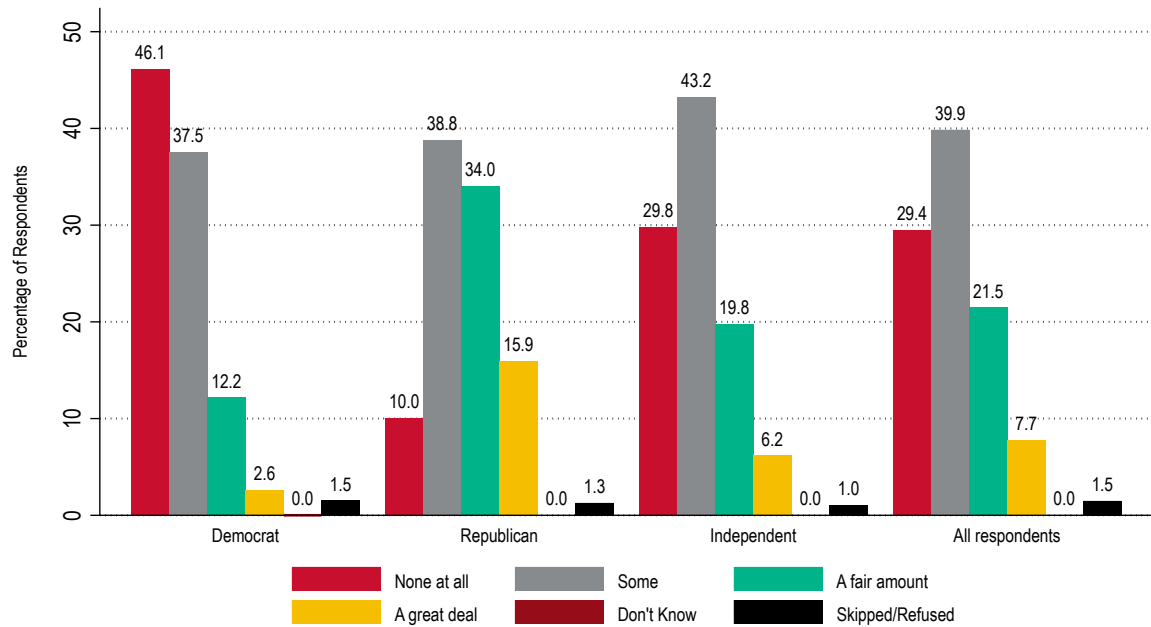
Across all respondents, over one-third (35.1%) reported having no confidence at all in the federal government; however, there are clear differences in opinion between the political parties. Republicans are the only group where more respondents have a fair amount of confidence (27.4%) than none at all (17.7%) as shown in Figure 4.2. Democrats are the only group with a majority reporting no confidence at all with 50.4% choosing this answer.

Figure 4.2: Confidence in the federal government by party ID



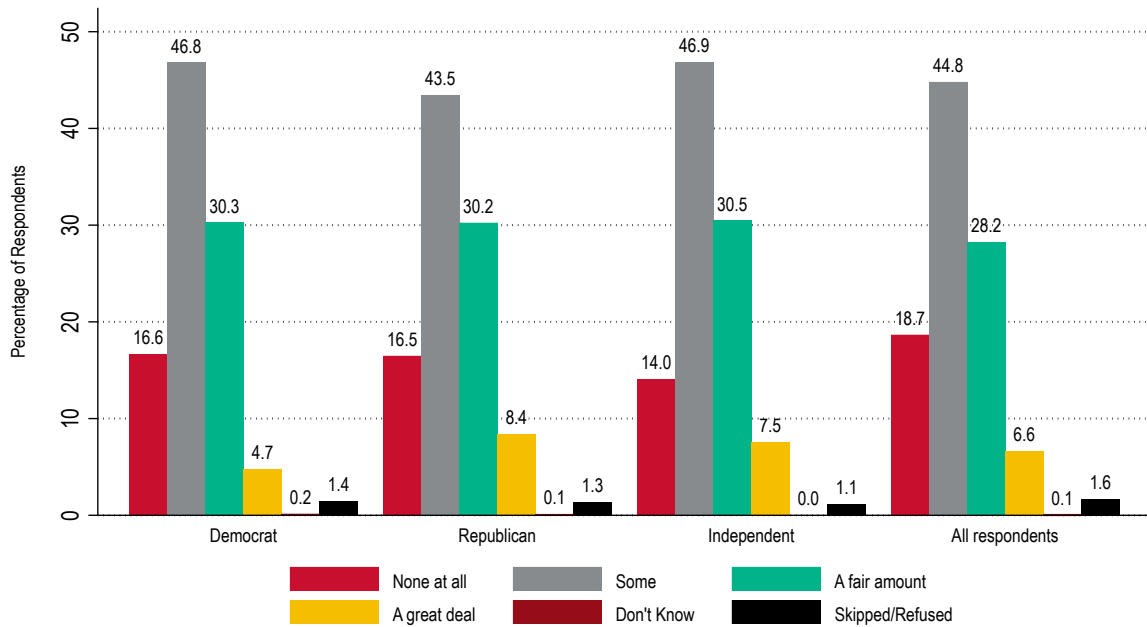
Respondents have slightly higher levels of confidence (a fair amount or a great deal) in the state government (29.2%) than in the federal government (27%). The number of people with some or a fair amount of confidence increased compared to confidence in the state government, even among Democrats (see Figure 4.3). For Democrats, those with some confidence increased from 32.2% to 37.5%. For Republicans, the biggest increases were for those with a fair amount of confidence and a great deal of confidence. A fair amount of confidence increased from 27.4% to 34.0% and a great deal increased from 13.5% to 15.9%.

Figure 4.3: Confidence in the **state** government by party ID



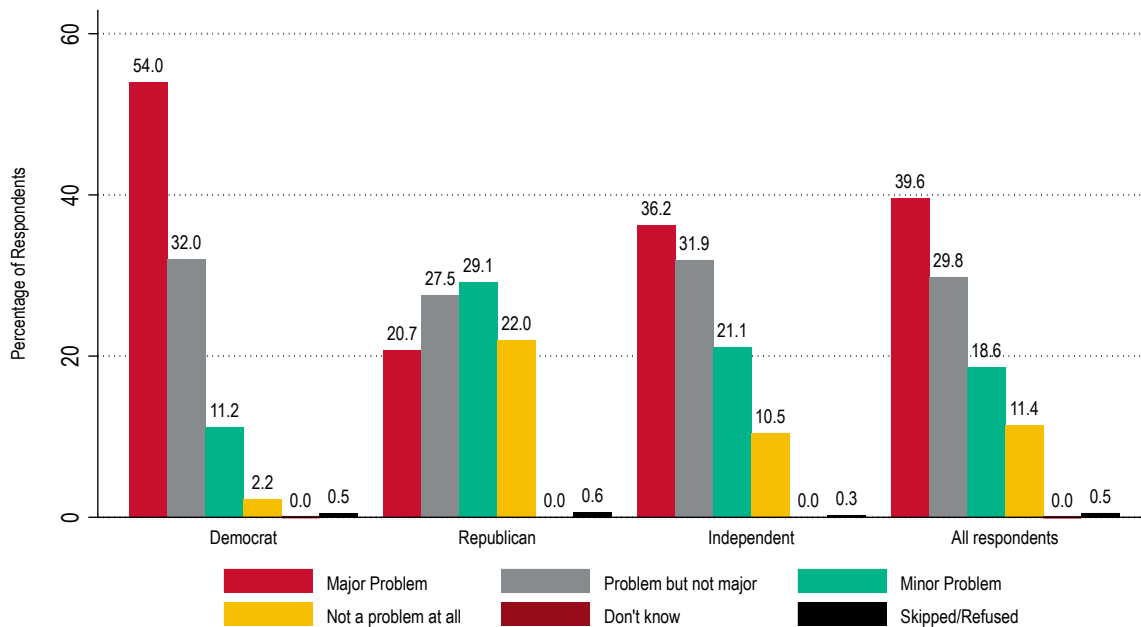
In Figure 4.4 we see the highest levels of confidence in the city government. As a whole, nearly 35% (34.8%) have trust in their city government a fair amount or a great deal, with only 18.7% having no trust at all. With regard to party identification, some confidence has a plurality, followed by a fair amount of confidence. City governments are the only level of government where there are more respondents with a fair amount of confidence than those reporting none at all.

Figure 4.4: Confidence in the city government by party ID



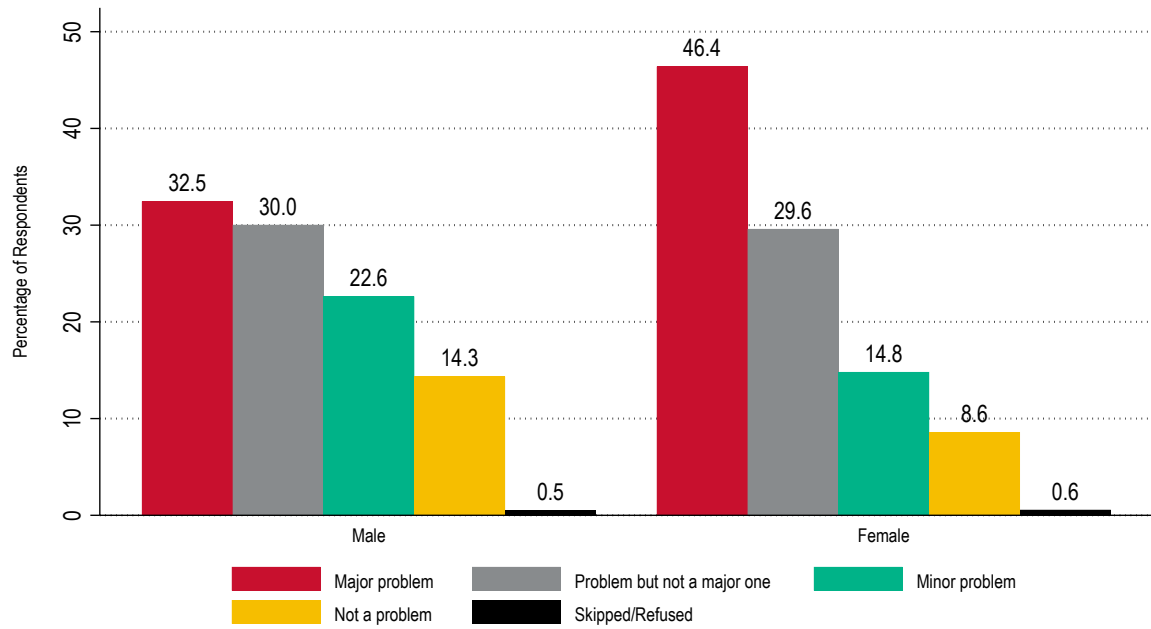
Another politically charged issue is racial and social injustice, and there are clear differences in how individuals across the political spectrum perceive its severity in Houston. Generally, about two-fifths (39.6%) of all respondents feel that this is a major problem in Houston, while just over a tenth (11.4%) do not think that it is a problem at all (Figure 4.5). However, when looking at this from a partisan lens, 54.0% of Democrats consider racial and social injustice a major problem, compared to only 20.7% of Republicans. Independents fall in between, with 36.2% viewing it as a major problem. Republicans are more likely see it as a minor problem (29.1%) or not a problem at all (22.0%). In contrast, only 11.2% of Democrats and 21.1% of Independents consider it a minor problem, and just 2.2% of Democrats and 10.5% of Independents say it is not a problem at all. These stark differences highlight how political identity strongly shapes perceptions of social and racial injustice, revealing deep divisions in how groups prioritize and interpret systemic inequality.

Figure 4.5: Perceptions of racial and social injustice in Houston by party ID



There are also notable gender differences in perceptions of racial and social injustice in Houston. As shown in Figure 4.6, women are more likely than men to view racial and social injustice as a major problem, with 46.4% of women expressing this view compared to 32.5% of men. Additionally, a larger share of men (30.0%) see it as a problem but not a major one, while only 29.6% of women do so. When it comes to considering racial and social injustice a minor or non-issue, male respondents again are more likely to downplay its significance, with 22.6% labeling it a minor problem and 14.3% saying it is not a problem at all, compared to 14.8% and 8.6% of female respondents, respectively. These differences suggest that women in the Houston MSA tend to perceive racial and social injustice as a more pressing concern than men, reflecting potential variations in lived experiences, awareness, or social attitudes between genders.

Figure 4.6: Perceptions of racial and social injustice in Houston by gender



Conclusion

The results from the *Houston Metro Community Survey* offer a revealing glimpse into the lived experiences, priorities, and perceptions of Greater Houston area residents. Across topics—economic conditions, community safety, political trust, and civic identity—emerging patterns point to a community that is diverse, engaged, and navigating a range of complex challenges. While many households express a sense of financial stability or optimism, a significant portion report economic strain, heightened concerns about the cost of living, and limited confidence in their ability to withstand future shocks. These findings also highlight significant variation in how residents perceive public safety, with gender and geographic differences shaping feelings of neighborhood security. Additionally, attitudes toward politically charged issues like climate change and racial and social injustice reveal deep partisan divides, even as many residents remain unaffiliated with either major political party. These findings signal a need for targeted interventions and sustained attention to economic equity, affordability, and trust-building across government institutions.

Concurrently, Houston MSA residents show awareness of the bigger issues shaping the city. Public safety, environmental vulnerability, and dissatisfaction with political leadership rise as shared concerns, going beyond individual circumstances and reinforcing the importance of inclusive, community-driven decision-making. The data also reveal that trust in government varies significantly by level, with local institutions often faring better than state or federal counterparts—a dynamic that could inform future engagement and policy efforts. These patterns are especially pronounced among different partisan groups, with Republicans expressing greater trust in local government compared to Democrats. Moreover, generational differences emerge in areas such as concern about debt, disaster preparedness, and access to affordable healthcare and childcare, underscoring the need for policies that reflect the realities of distinct life stages and family structures. Together, these insights underscore the value of continued, localized tracking of public attitudes. The **SPACE City Panel** was created to meet that need.

Built on the foundation of this one-time survey, the panel will continue to monitor resident experiences and priorities through quarterly surveys focused on household economics, politics, sustainability, and resiliency. Findings will be shared regularly on the SPACE City Panel’s [web page](#) and/or spacecitypanel.org, offering timely data to inform more responsive, community-centered decision-making across the Greater Houston area.

