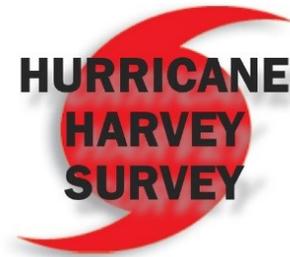


Harris County Flood Control District Bond Election Survey

The Hobby School of Public Affairs' second survey of the impact of Hurricane Harvey was conducted in June - July 2018. These highlights focus on questions surrounding Harris County's special election to issue bonds to fund flood mitigation projects. The special election will be held on August 25, 2018, with early voting beginning on August 8.

The full survey report covering the post-Harvey experience will be released at the end of August.



Highlights

Number of respondents: 815

Margin of error: +/- 3.4%

- Fifty-five (55) percent of all respondents reported they will vote in favor of the Harris County's Flood Control District's proposed \$2.5 billion bond to address flooding in the county.
- Only 10% of respondents reported they would vote against the proposed bond.
- More than a third (35%) of respondents reported they were unsure how they would vote on the proposed bond.
- Voter turnout for the bond election on August 25 is expected to be low; only 36% of respondents reported they were certain to vote in the election.
- The proposed bond garners support from 62% of those respondents who reported they are certain to vote in the special election.
 - Support for the bond declines among persons who reported they are not certain they will vote in the bond election.
- Persons who reported they suffered property damage in Hurricane Harvey are more supportive of the proposed bond (60%) than those who reported they did not suffer any property damage from Hurricane Harvey (52%).
- Persons who reported suffering personal and/or property damage from previous severe weather (56%) were no more likely to support the proposed bond than persons who reported they had never suffered from previous severe weather (55%).
- Older (61% for age 46 to 64) and better-educated (69% for college graduate) respondents are significantly supportive of the proposed bond.
- Fifty-eight (58) percent of Republicans and 63% of Democrats are supportive of the proposed bond.

Overview

Support for Bond by Flooding Experience

There is essentially no difference in support for the bond proposal among respondents who experienced flooding since 2001 (including Hurricane Harvey) and among those who did not suffer flooding: 56 percent and 55 percent respectively. This pattern suggests that Harris County residents perceive severe weather as a threat to the community, and they are willing to pay to fund measures aimed at reducing the negative impact of future storms.

Support for Bond in Second Wave by Responses to Property Tax Increases in First Wave

When comparing respondents who participated in the two waves of our survey (conducted in November-December 2017 and in June-July 2018), we find significant changes in the level of support for raising funds to mitigate future flooding. In the first wave we found that 46 percent of respondents expressed that they were not willing to pay any more in property taxes to implement policies to protect the Houston area from the effects of severe weather. Yet 42 percent of these respondents are supportive of the Harris County bond and only 13 percent oppose it. The change in support for raising funds for flood mitigation through a bond is mostly driven by respondents who had suffered losses during Hurricane Harvey.

On the other hand, only 2 percent of those who expressed supporting higher property taxes for mitigation purposes in the December wave of the survey would not vote for the bond in the August 25 election; 23 percent of respondents in this group are unsure whether they would vote for or against the Harris County proposal. Additionally, 23.8 percent of respondents are willing to pay more than the proposed 1.4% increase. Support for policy initiatives aimed at protecting the Houston area from future flooding remains high in both waves of the survey.

Confidence in Local Officials' Knowledge of How to Mitigate Future Flooding

Half (50 percent) of Harris County residents are Somewhat Confident that county and city officials know how to reduce the negative impact of future flooding. However, approximately two-fifths (39 percent) are Not Confident or Not Confident At All that their local leaders know how to mitigate the impact of future floods. Only 7 percent are Very Confident in their local leaders flood mitigation competency.

Among likely voters, the gap between those who are Somewhat Confident and Not Confident/Not Confident At All narrows from the 11 percent found among all Harris County residents to 3 percent, with 48 percent Somewhat Confident and 45 percent either Not Confident or Not Confident At All. Only 5 percent of likely voters are Very Confident in their leaders' knowledge in the area of flood mitigation.

Concern about \$2.5 Billion Bond Going to Developers and Construction Firms Rather than to Flood Reduction Projects

Almost one-half (48 percent) of Harris County residents are either Extremely Concerned or Very Concerned that much of the money from the \$2.5 billion bond issue will go primarily to politically connected developers and construction firms instead of directly to flood risk reduction projects. In contrast, only a modest 16 percent are either Not Very Concerned or Not At All Concerned about this occurring. A little more than one-third (34 percent) of respondents are Somewhat Concerned about substantial funds being diverted to benefit politically connected firms and individuals.

Harris County residents who are most likely to vote in the August 25 election are even more skeptical than the general public about the \$2.5 billion bond being directed to projects that will reduce the risk of flooding rather than to political insiders in the developer and construction communities. Among these likely voters, 59 percent are either Extremely or Very Concerned about funding being diverted to the politically connected, with only 12 percent Not Very Concerned or Not At All Concerned. The remaining 27 percent are only Somewhat Concerned about the diversion of bond funds to political insiders.