

Port Arthur Community Survey:

What Do Residents Think about Their Town and Its Industry?

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Executive Summary

In June, 2025, a team of researchers from Stony Brook University collaborated with the Community In-Power and Development Association (CIDA) and other Port Arthur community members to conduct a survey of 155 Port Arthur residents. Questions centered upon what residents thought about the town and especially about the local refinery and petrochemical industry: how residents weighed the benefits versus the burdens of this industry as well as what additional contributions they would like to see it make. Among our findings:

1. What residents most appreciated about living in Port Arthur were:
 - 1.1. their personal ties and sense of community;
 - 1.2. the jobs and economy;
 - 1.3. the services and amenities;
 - 1.4. the cost of living and housing; and
 - 1.5. the surrounding environment and location.
2. When asked about the benefits of the local refinery and petrochemical industry to the local community:
 - 2.1. Half (50%) affirmed the jobs it provided as “extremely” or “largely beneficial,” while half (50%) saw its jobs as only “somewhat” beneficial or of “little” or “no” benefit.
 - 2.2. For other local benefits from this industry—bolstering spending power, providing job training, investing in the downtown, paying local taxes, and making donations—answers of “somewhat,” “little” or “no” benefit edged out those of “extremely” or “largely beneficial.”
 - 2.3. Majorities saw all these benefits as either diminishing or staying the same in recent years rather than increasing.
3. A majority of 51% thought that the industry was addressing community needs either “poorly” or “not so well.”
4. Burdens of the local refinery and petrochemical industry:
 - 4.1. 49% of those surveyed rated the air quality in their neighborhood as “not very good” or “poor.” They judged that “most all” (48%) or “much” (36%) of the air pollution came from local industrial plants.
 - 4.2. Solid majorities said that they were “very” or “extremely” concerned about the industry’s effects on their and their families' health from air pollution (65%), accidents (63%), and transportation of hazardous materials (62%).
 - 4.3. Most homeowners thought the industry had been “extremely influential” (15%), “influential” (11%), or “somewhat or slightly influential” (34%) in lowering their home values.
5. Climate Change
 - 5.1. Solid majorities thought that extreme weather events often associated with climate change had become either “much” or “somewhat worse”: hurricanes (61%), flooding (68%), heat waves (66%)

- 5.2. 65% thought that climate change had already begun to affect Port Arthur “a great deal” or a “moderate amount.”
- 5.3. Most held “the burning of fossil fuels” responsible, either “a lot” (44%) or “some” (30%).
6. Residents were also asked what their priorities would be for more local industry support. Here’s what they rated either “highest” or “high” priority:
 - 6.1. #1, Hiring of locals (65%)
 - 6.2. #2, Job training leading to industry jobs (64%); More transparency about local pollution (64%)
 - 6.3. #4, Bolstering schools (63%); Fortifying protections against flooding (63%)
 - 6.4. #6, Developing recreational spaces in neighborhoods that lack them (61%)
 - 6.5. #7, Increasing the industry’s tax and other contributions to local government (58%)
 - 6.6. #8, Investing more in Port Arthur’s downtown (56%); Fair-priced buyouts of homes near refining and petrochemical plants (56%)

Introduction

In June 2025, to better understand community priorities for corporate donations and local policy in Port Arthur, Texas, a non-white-majority city teeming with petrochemical plants, a sociological survey was conducted. The survey was the culmination of a three-year community-based research collaboration between Hilton Kelley of Port Arthur's Community In-Power Development Association (CIDA), Christopher Sellers, and Mark Chambers, which was funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF). The grant had supported deep research into Port Arthur's historical accumulation of environmental and other burdens from its petrochemical plants, and the faltering attempts of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to address many of the community's concerns. Much of this work has been historical, so to obtain a representative assessment of community members' priorities and perceived needs from a more vital contemporary angle, we decided to collaborate with sociologist Yongjun Zhang on a survey. We present here some results from this week-long survey, along with some initial analysis of them. By sharing what we found with community members, corporate management of Port Arthur's biggest plants, and the town council, we hope the survey can foster civic improvements that more directly reflect the priorities and preferences of local citizens.

Background on Port Arthur

Beginning in the early 1900s, the Texas oil boom began in Beaumont, a short distance from Port Arthur, after the opening of the Spindletop Lucas gusher in 1901. The Texas oil boom quickly extended to Port Arthur, and by 1916, its Gulf refinery ranked as the second largest in the United States, and later two additional major refineries emerged over the next two decades, which established Port Arthur as a majority non-White city. Port Arthur has hosted some of the world's most prosperous oil refineries and chemical plants, including a Motiva operation that is now the largest in North America. Yet the jobs and other benefits of the petrochemical industry that brought Port Arthur into the mid-20th century have dwindled, even as local factories continue to impose immense and longstanding environmental challenges on the city. Hardest hit by the clustering of so many major polluters in one place have been Black Port Arthurians, long concentrated by Jim Crow in neighborhoods next to the largest refineries on the West Side. Over the past four decades, they have increasingly been joined by a growing Latino and Asian population, further turning Port Arthur into a majority non-white city.

Today, the West Side is surrounded by refining and petrochemical facilities that include the second largest oil refinery in North America. Partly as a consequence, Port Arthur has figured prominently in the national literature and movements highlighting environmental justice, as a paradigmatic case of the "sacrifice zone" (Lerner, 2010; Lee, 2022). Since 2000, a sustained environmental justice community of activists, led by CIDA, has worked tirelessly to reveal and curb pollution and to "foster and promote a healthy, safe and economically vital community."

Most important, in the shadow of these industrial facilities are a tough and resilient 55,335 people, 29% of whom live in poverty, and 42.5% of whom are Black, 35% Latino, and 25% White. Some in the local government have pushed for more accountability and contributions

from the city's industry, even as local oil, gas, and petrochemical companies have championed their own charitable giving. But leaders in local industries as well as municipal governments have all too rarely asked community residents themselves what they think, remember, and hope for from local industries: from how these have impacted the local community, positively as well as negatively, to what they now contribute, to what additional contributions people would like to see them make.

Introducing our Research Team and Its Work

Our current research project started in 2022 as a collaboration between Port Arthurian Hilton Kelley, founder of the Community In-Power Development Association (CIDA), and an interdisciplinary team within the Environmental Data and Governance Initiative (EDGI), led by Christopher Sellers, a professor of environmental history at Stony Brook University. In keeping with Sellers' expertise and long-standing relationship with Kelley and the Port Arthur community, a significant share of the initial research has been historical. It built on earlier NSF-sponsored research in Port Arthur by Sellers begun in 2010 which involved 15 interviews, a witness seminar, and the collection of many published and unpublished documents on the town's history. In 2022, Mark Chambers, an assistant professor of environmental history also at Stony Brook University, began working on the project with Kelley and Sellers, and more recently in 2025, sociologists Yongjun Zhang and Kajol Patel joined the team. To gather a larger and more representative sample of community experiences and opinions than individual interviews could provide, Sellers and Zhang led the design of a community survey of local residents.

In consultation with Kelley, and drawing on suggestions by interviewees and other knowledgeable local contacts, Sellers, Chambers, and Zhang formulated the survey's questions and methodology, using Qualtrix software and other assistance provided by Stony Brook University. The questions centered upon what residents thought about the town in which they lived, and especially about the local refinery and petrochemical industry, which has played such an important role in Port Arthur's past and present. We were especially interested to hear how residents weighed the various benefits versus the burdens of this industry on their community, as well as what additional contributions they'd like to see it make to their city.

The four primary surveyors were all recruited from the Port Arthur community. Three of these surveyors were Black or mixed race, and one Latino. Sellers, who is white, undertook some recruitment as well but mainly coordinated survey-taking "on the ground" in Port Arthur, along with Hilton Kelley. After some training by Zhang in survey outreach, the surveyors drew on their own extensive local contacts to conduct the surveying. A \$50 credit card ("Clincard") was promised and then distributed to those taking the survey. Surveying began at a civic celebration to honor Juneteenth, held on June 12, and ran for another week and a half, mostly between June 12-20, 2025. In addition to attending community gatherings, surveyors reached out to their own networks in the local community; ads were also placed in the local newspaper and via flyers at public events. Overall, the survey team recruited some 155 residents to take the survey, surpassing an initial target of 122, with only a handful failing to answer many questions.

Survey Sample	Percent	2023 (U.S. Census/American Community Survey)	Percent
Black or African American	53.64%	Black Alone	42.30%
Latino	27.15%	Latino or Hispanic	34.00%
White	20.53%	White alone (including Latino whites)	30.80%
Asian	1.32%	Asian Alone	6.20%
Multi-Racial or Other	18.54%	Identifying with Two or More Races	13.30%

Table 1: Port Arthur Survey Participants versus 2023 Census Figures for Port Arthur.
 Source: American Community Survey, 2023, as reported on “Port Arthur,” *Census Reporter* (accessed 10/31/2025)¹

The surveyors and the people they surveyed each reflected Port Arthur’s current demographics, albeit imperfectly. Partly as a consequence of how many of our surveyors were Black or mixed race, those in our survey included a higher share of Black residents and lower shares of Latino and Asian residents as well as non-Latino Whites, compared to 2023 Census figures for Port Arthur. Also reflecting how all four of our primary surveyors were women, our survey sample turned out to be 71% female and only 29% male. Port Arthur’s women may have been more open to participating in such a survey than were the city’s men.

Back at Stony Brook University, the survey results have been compiled and analyzed by a team including Sellers and Chambers, sociologist Yongjun Zhang, with the vital assistance of Kajol Patel, a sociology graduate assistant who has helped us interpret and portray the results. We present here a descriptive summary of what we found. All percentages are calculated based on how many people answered a given question, not counting those who gave no answer.

¹ The 2023 American Community Survey data on Port Arthur was accessed through the census reporter website:
https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US4858820-port-arthur-tx/#:~:text=Here's%20some%20census%20data%20for%20Port%20Arthur%2C,77.1%25%20*%20Bachelor's%20degree%20or%20higher:%2011.4%25

Findings:

The Benefits of Living in Port Arthur

Relatively few survey participants, just 13% (20/150), reported they “often” considered moving from Port Arthur. Another 19% (28/150) had “occasionally” considered moving, and 15% (22/150) had thought about it “once or twice.” But if 49% had at least considered moving away, 51% (76/150) reported not having considered it at all. These answers affirm the importance of what Port Arthurians said about what they most appreciated about living in this city.

When asked to write out three things they most appreciated about living in this city, those surveyed painted a rich portrait of Port Arthur’s many virtues and attractions.

Just over 40% (58/142) talked about their personal ties to people in the community:

“Family oriented”

“Family”

“Close to family”

“Family friendly”

“Family value”

“My entire family lives here”

“My family and friends”

“Friends”

“Close to friends”

“The people”

“Nice people”

“Somewhat nice people”

“Knowing almost everyone”

“We know each other”

“familiar people”

“hometown”

About 28% (40/142) mentioned the jobs and employment available in the town:

“Jobs”

“Employment”

“Employment opportunities”

“Lots of jobs available”

“Job opportunities”any job opportunities”

“Good Work Opportunities”

“Work”

“Working close to home”
“Close to work”
“AT LEAST 40 HOURS”

The same proportion (28%, 40/142) talked about the sense and character of community they experienced in Port Arthur:

“Community oriented”
“Community”
“Great Community”
“Small Community”
“My Community”
“The hospitality”
“Community unity”

Just under a quarter (23%, 33/142) mentioned their appreciation of how Port Arthur seemed like a small town:

“small town feeling”
“Small Town Environment”
“Everything's close”
“small city”
“Peaceful”
“The quietness”

A significant share (28/142) also singled out Port Arthur’s affordability and low costs as an advantage of living there (quotes).

“Affordable cost of living”
“Low cost of living”
“Affordable”
“lower expenses”
“Cheap groceries”
“cheap rent”
“Cheaper taxes”

Some (20/142) singled out the city’s schools and educational opportunities as benefits of living there:

“Schools”
“Close schools”
“Nearby schools”
“Education”
“Affordable education”

“Small schools”

As many (20/142) highlighted the amenities they appreciated in Port Arthur...

“Proximity of necessities”

“Different stores”

“Stores”

“Infrastructure”

“Have everything Beaumont has”

...or separately, the ease of getting around (18/142),

“No traffic”

“Everything is short distance”

“Easy to get around”

“Roads easy to navigate”

...the food and restaurants (13/142),

“Good food”

“Food”

“Restaurants”

“Seafood”

“A lot of restaurants”

“Bars”

...its housing (9/142),

“Good housing”

...its religious communities (11/142),

“Church”

“Religious freedom”

...and its culture and history (8/142).

“Rich history”

“Culture”

“The culture”

“Cultural diversity”

“Community events”

“Multicultural”

A good share of those surveyed also singled out the city’s location on the Gulf Coast (23/142)...

“Access to Gulf”

“Close to the water”
 “Near water”
 “Proximity of the Gulf Coast”
 “Beach”

...and outdoor or nature-related opportunities (8/142).

“Waterways”
 “Parks”
 “Good fishing”
 “Close to nature”
 “Outdoor activities”

Benefits of living in Port Arthur, share of total mentions by theme
 Counts include multiple mentions by the same respondent out of 406 given responses

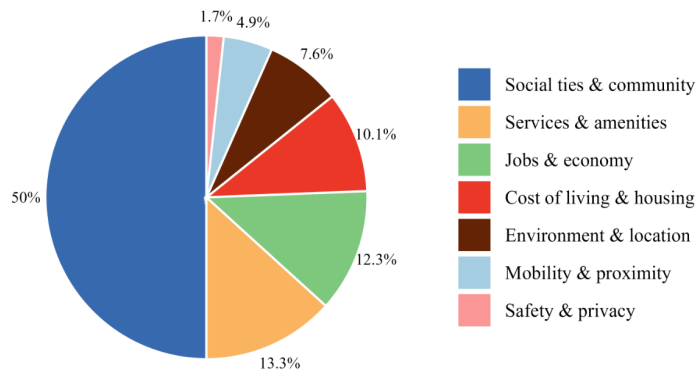


Figure 1: Benefits of living in Port Arthur by share of total mentions of each coded theme out of 406 total given responses by 143 respondents.

Benefits of living in Port Arthur, number of respondents citing each type of benefit
 Each respondent counted once per theme, even if repeated out of 143 total respondents

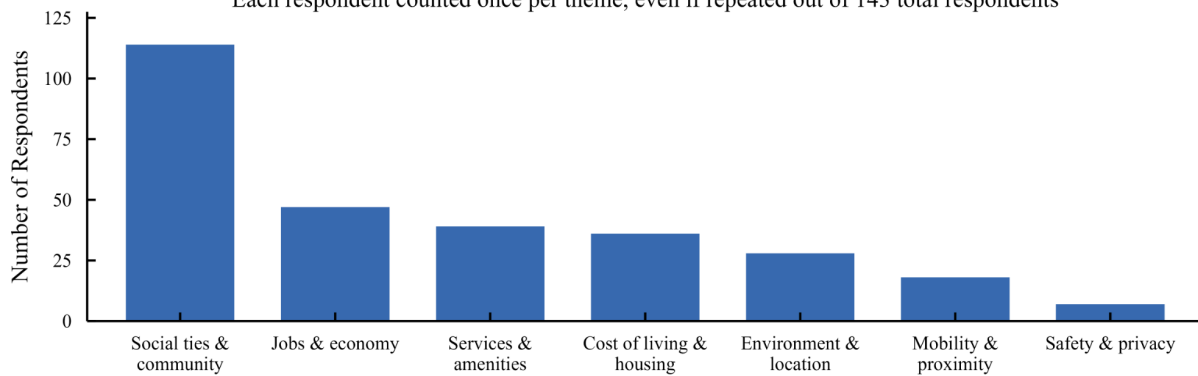


Figure 2: Benefits of living in Port Arthur by number of respondents who mention each coded theme out of 143 respondents.

Benefits from Port Arthur's Petrochemical and Refinery Industry

When asked to write out the benefits of living in Port Arthur, only four of those surveyed singled out Port Arthur's refineries ("the refinery"; "refineries" or "Oil companies") among these. And though only a small number reported current employment in petrochemical or refinery plants, a great many of them reported ties to this industry that went beyond their own current jobs. When we asked them directly about the several ways that industry might have contributed to their city, many more affirmed its economic benefits, while others did not.

Ties to this industry: Only a small share (14/149, or 9.4%) were themselves currently employed in area refineries or petrochemical plants, slightly higher than the 6-7% we've estimated from the available recent employment statistics for the city. Neither of those figures reflect the depth of ties to this industry reported by our respondents, the legacy of Port Arthur's heavier dependence on refinery and petrochemical jobs in earlier decades. This industry's share of local jobs peaked at 38% in 1960. Today, nearly that same share, over a third of our respondents (54/149 or 36.2%) reported working in this industry in earlier years. And over half, 65% (97/149), reported someone in their family had been employed in oil, gas, and petrochemical production at some point.

Ties to this industry thus ran deeper than current employment in this industry suggests, whether among those taking our survey or in recent job figures. And when prompted by our questions about the local benefits it had brought, many affirmed them.

Ranking this industry's benefits: The biggest local benefits from this industry, as assessed by our respondents, were: first, the jobs it provided; second, the spending power its paychecks brought to local businesses, and third, the training programs it already supports to prepare local residents for its jobs. Around half—more precisely, 50%, 49%, and 47%, respectively—ranked each of these benefits as "largely" or "extremely beneficial." Yet even on these three fronts, an equal or bigger share of our respondents were more critical, with ratings of 50% (for jobs), 51% (for spending power), and 53% (for job training) as only "somewhat" beneficial or of "little" or "no" benefit.

How beneficial to the community is this industry today, in 2025, on each of these fronts?

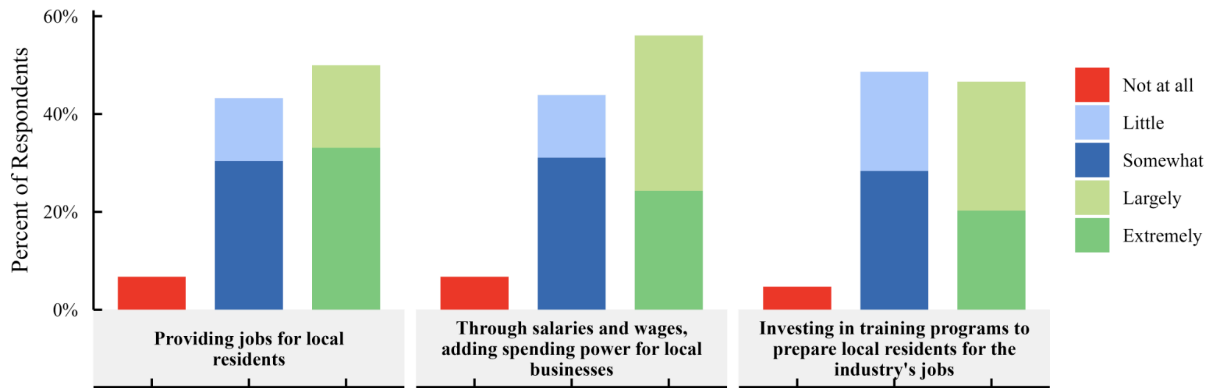


Figure 3: Respondents' ratings of the perceived benefits of Port Arthur's oil, gas, and petrochemical industry in three areas-- providing jobs, contributing to local spending power through wages and salaries, and investing in job training for residents-- from "not at all" to "extremely" beneficial.

Our respondents were still more critical about the three other suggested possible benefits. For investing in the downtown and other public spaces, only 35% ranked the industry's efforts as "largely" or "extremely beneficial," while 65% thought them only "somewhat," "little" or non-beneficial. So too with the industry's provision of taxes and other financial support to the city government--38% "largely" or "extremely" beneficial versus 62% only "somewhat" or of "little" or "no" benefit--and for donations to charities and other local institutions that address community needs--38.5% versus 61.5%.

How beneficial to the community is this industry today, in 2025, on each of these fronts?

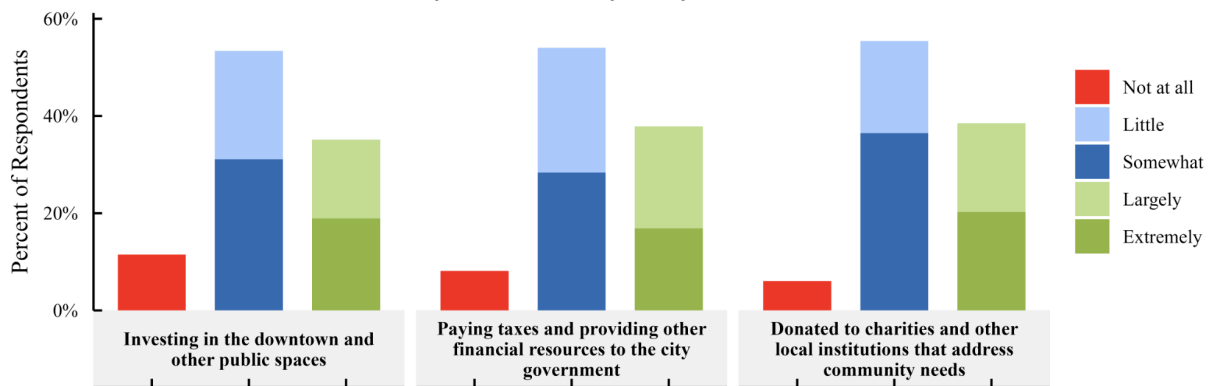


Figure 4: Respondents' ratings of the perceived benefits of Port Arthur's oil, gas, and petrochemical industry in three areas-- investing in the downtown and public spaces, paying taxes and providing financial resources to the city government, and donating to local charities and institutions-- from "not at all" to "extremely" beneficial.

We also asked people to rate how well they felt Port Arthur's oil, gas, and petrochemical industry was doing in "addressing the needs of the local community." The largest share, about half or 51% (74/146), answered either "poorly" or "not so well." Another 28% (41/146) thought local

needs were being addressed “somewhat well,” and only 21% (31/146) either “very well” or “extremely well”-- the smallest share.

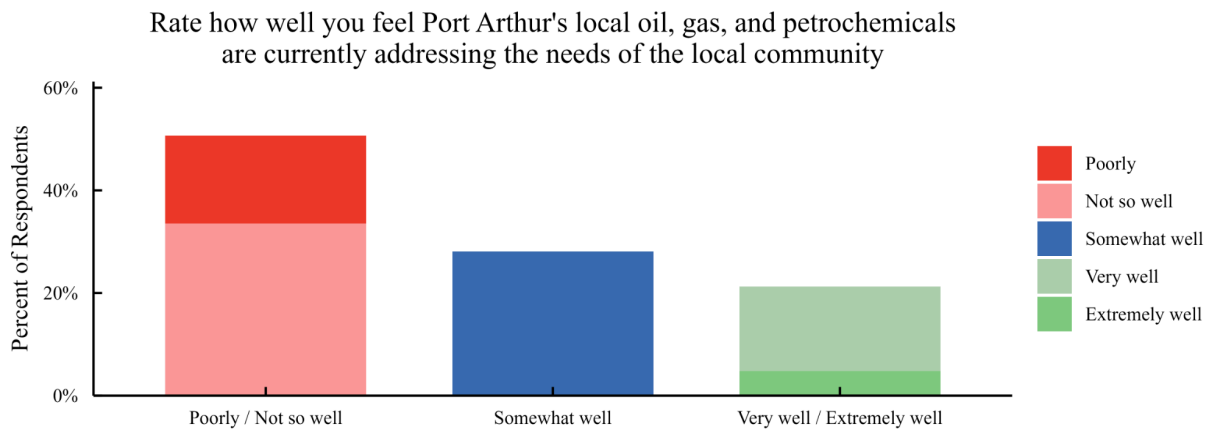


Figure 5: Respondents’ current rating of how well Port Arthur’s local oil, gas, and petrochemicals industry is addressing the local community’s needs, out of 146 responses.

The overall message of Port Arthur residents is that yes, the industry is bringing some benefits to the community. But on most all these fronts, they could be doing a lot better in addressing local needs.

Changes in benefits over time: When we asked about how our respondents saw each type of benefit as trending, roughly equal shares saw declines or minimal change, with fewer reporting any rises in benefits. Across the six types of benefits, only a minority of those taking our survey saw any of these local benefits from this industry as improving.

On the other hand, many saw key benefits as declining over time. That was especially the case with local jobs provided by this industry: 43% (64/148) said local employment in this industry had been decreasing (had been “much” or “somewhat more” in the past), while 37% saw little change, and only 20% believed these jobs had been increasing. The first group’s perceptions are also aligned with available job statistics for Port Arthur, which show a decline [**find the numbers**].

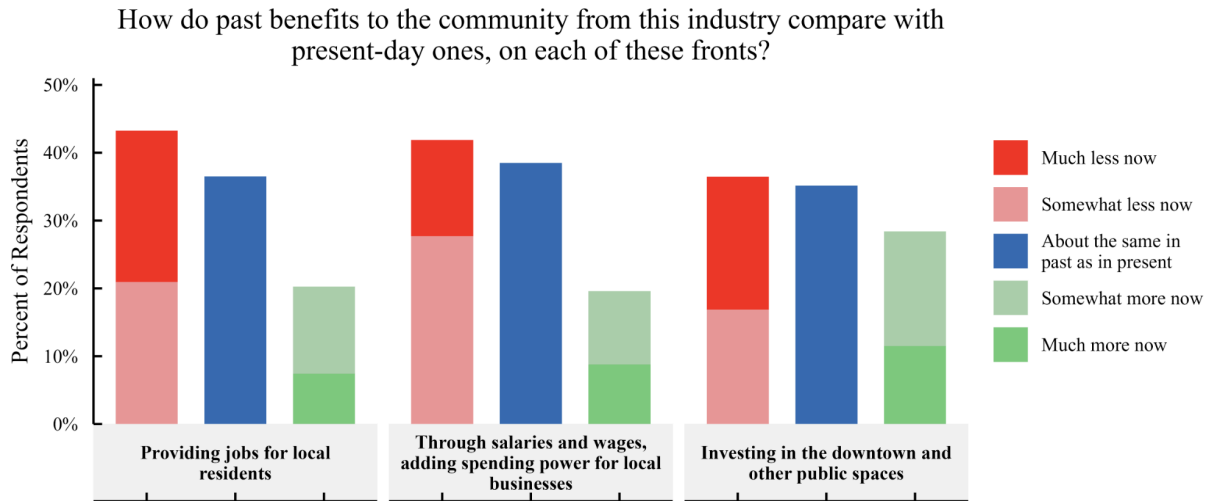


Figure 6: Respondents’ perceived changes in community benefits from Port Arthur’s oil, gas, and petrochemical industry on three fronts-- providing jobs, contributing to local spending power through salaries and wages, and investing in the downtown and public spaces-- based on ratings of each benefit now compared to the past.

Similarly, the biggest share of those surveyed saw declining industry benefits from the spending power it provided—42%, versus 37% for “about the same,” and 20% seeing more present benefits than in the past; and from its investments in the downtown and other public spaces—37% noting a decline, 35% a similar level, and 28% a growth in these investments.

For the other three local benefits from this industry about which we asked, the largest share of people surveyed saw little change over time. But for all three of these, as for the three above, the view that industry’s benefits were on the rise was the least popular, drawing the smallest share of respondents. At best, barely more than a quarter of those surveyed saw any of these benefits as improving over time.

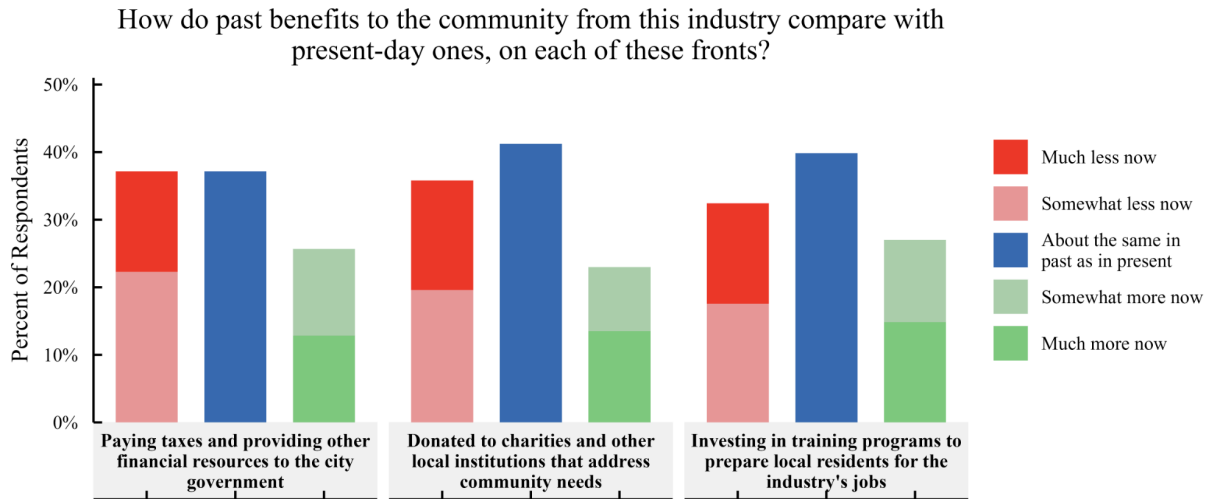


Figure 7: Respondents' perceived changes in community benefits from Port Arthur's oil, gas, and petrochemical industry on three fronts-- paying taxes and providing financial resources to the city government, donations to local charities and institutions-- based on ratings of each benefit now compared to the past.

For most if not all respondents, the several benefits brought by this industry, while substantial, have either remained static or shrunken over time.

Burdens from Port Arthur's Petrochemical and Refinery Industry: Pollution, Health, and Safety

Alongside the benefits this industry has brought to the city of Port Arthur, those surveyed largely agree about some of the most significant burdens it has imposed. Foremost among these are the threats it has posed to people's health, safety, and well-being.

Air Pollution: The biggest share of those surveyed, 49% (71/143) reported the quality of local air as either "not very good" or "poor." A somewhat smaller share reported air quality as "fairly good" (43% (61/143)). Only 10% (14/143) said the air quality was either "very good" or "excellent," even though 65% (97/149) reported living at least a mile from a refinery or chemical plant.

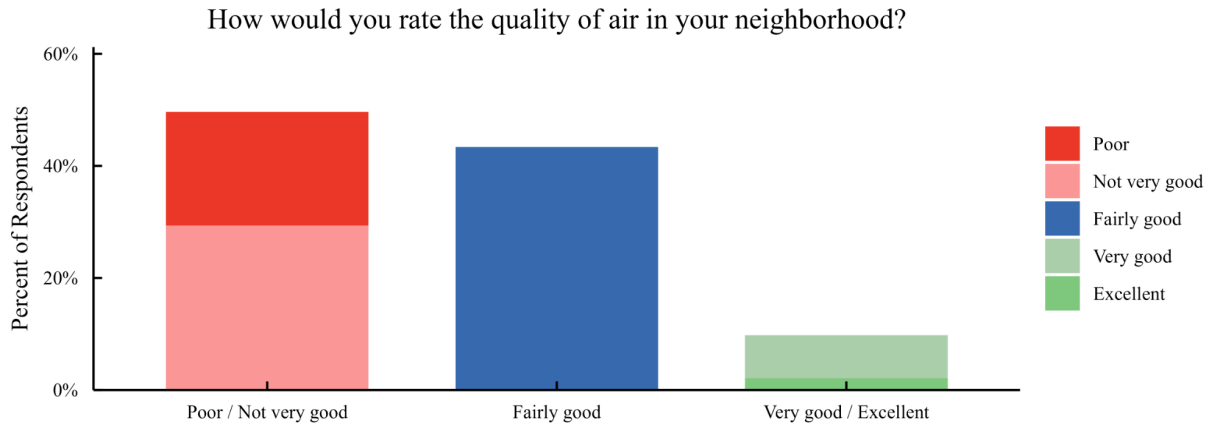


Figure 8: Respondents' rating of the air quality in Port Arthur from "poor" to "excellent."

A large majority of those surveyed thought that "most" or "much" of the air pollution in their own neighborhoods came from "local oil, petrochemical and other industrial plants."

How much of the air pollution in your neighborhood do you think comes from local oil, petrochemical, and other industrial plants?

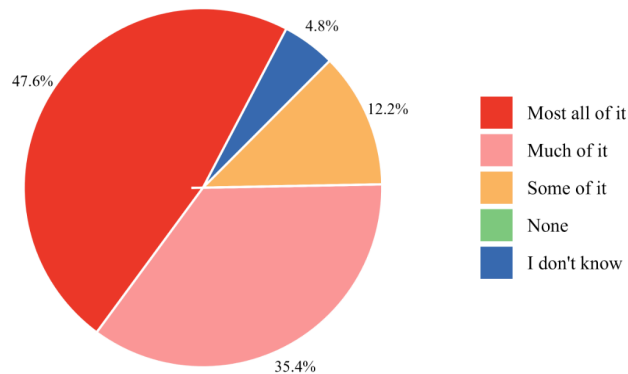


Figure 9: Respondents' views on how much of the air pollution in their neighborhood comes from local oil, petrochemical, and other industrial plants, out of 147 responses.

Majorities of those surveyed expressed deep concerns about the effects of this industry on their own and their families' health. They worried not just about air pollution but the dangers from explosions or spills and from the transportation of hazardous materials to and from local plants.

How concerned are you that the following impacts from local industrial plants might harm your health or your family's health?

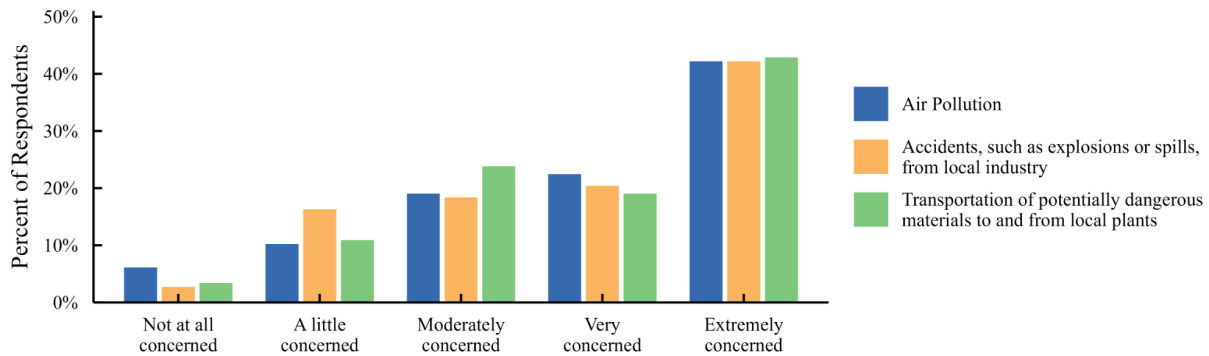


Figure 10: Respondents' concern about the impact of local industrial plants on their and their family's health, out of 147 responses.

Burdens of Port Arthur's Petrochemical and Refinery Industry: Climate Change

Another topic on which residents expressed considerable concern was that of climate change. Many agreed that its impacts were already being felt in Port Arthur itself as well as other places around the nation and world, and that fossil fuels such as those produced by local industry were contributing to these trends.

Trends in Extreme Weather: Most of those surveyed thought that extreme weather events such as hurricanes, flooding, and heat waves were either "much worse" or "somewhat worse" than in the past.

What has been your recent experience with each extreme type of weather event in Port Arthur as compared to that in years or decades earlier?

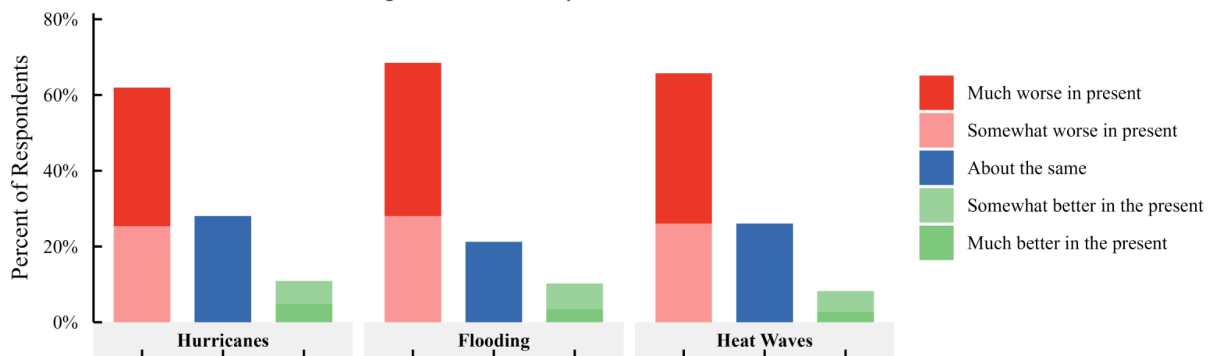


Figure 11: Respondents' recent experience with hurricanes, flooding, and heat waves in Port Arthur, compared to years or decades earlier, out of 146 responses.

Climate change is already here and posing serious threats: Most saw global climate change as already having significant effects on Port Arthur, with 66% reporting they see a moderate amount or a great deal of impact. And they assessed the ongoing and future threats it imposed on this city as either “serious” or very serious.

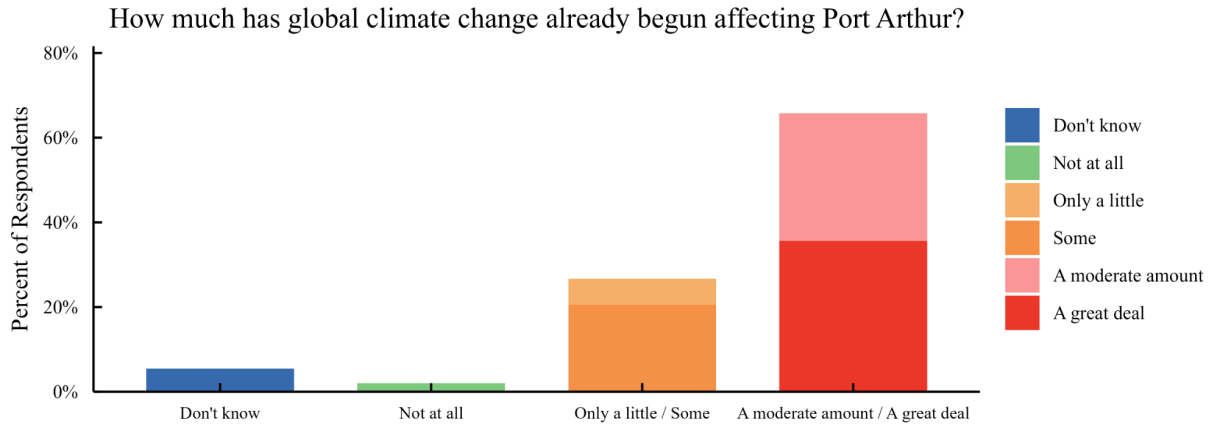


Figure 12: Respondents’ perception of how much climate change has affected Port Arthur, out of 146 responses.

They saw its threats from their own neighborhood and nation, especially to the planet’s well-being, as serious.

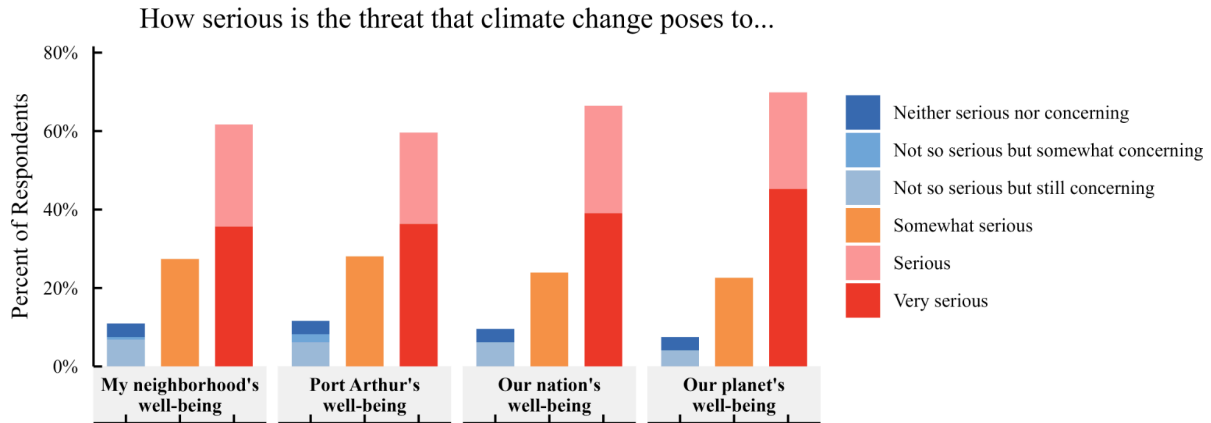


Figure 13: Respondents’ perception of how serious a threat climate change is to their neighborhood, Port Arthur, the United States of America, and the planet, out of 146 responses.

And fossil fuels are a significant cause: A considerable majority agreed that the burning of fossil fuels has had “a lot” (47%; 68/146) or “some impact” (32%; 46/146) on climate change. Only 13% (19/146) think fossil fuels are “not much” to blame, and no one responded that fossil fuel burning didn’t have any impact on climate change.

How much impact do you think the burning of fossil fuels has had on climate change?

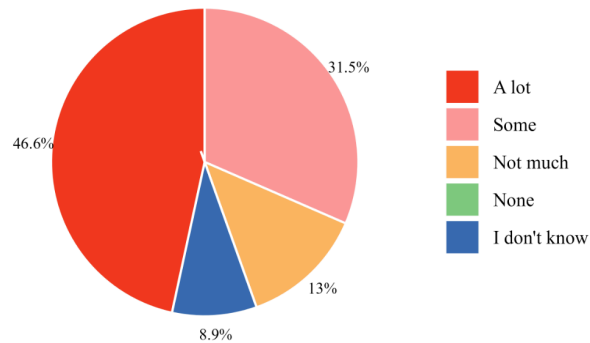


Figure 14: Respondents' perception of how much impact the burning of fossil fuels has had on climate change, out of 146 responses.

We did not probe how closely Port Arthur residents connected the fossil fuels they implicated as causing climate change to the local refineries. However, the strength of the connections they drew, combined with the majority's sense that Port Arthur itself is already seeing the impacts of a changing climate, strongly implies that this community, by and large, frames those impacts as burdens for which the local refineries bear some responsibility.

Burdens of Port Arthur's Petrochemical and Refinery Industry: Home Values

We also inquired about one other way in which the local petrochemical and refinery industry has impacted the local community: its influence on home and property valuation. As these impacts would be most clearly and directly felt by those who themselves owned their own homes, we asked this question only of those who told us they or their family were homeowners, 94/149 or 63.1% of those surveyed. We posed this question in a neutral way, letting those surveyed determine whether they thought this industry's presence had a positive or a negative influence on the value of their homes.

Of those who answered, 60% (55/92) thought that this industry has had a detrimental effect on the value of their home, while 27.2% (25/92) thought its influence had been neutral. Only 13% (12/92) thought that the industry has had a positive effect on their home values.

If you own your own home: How influential do you think Port Arthur’s oil, gas, and petrochemical facilities have been on the value of the home you own?

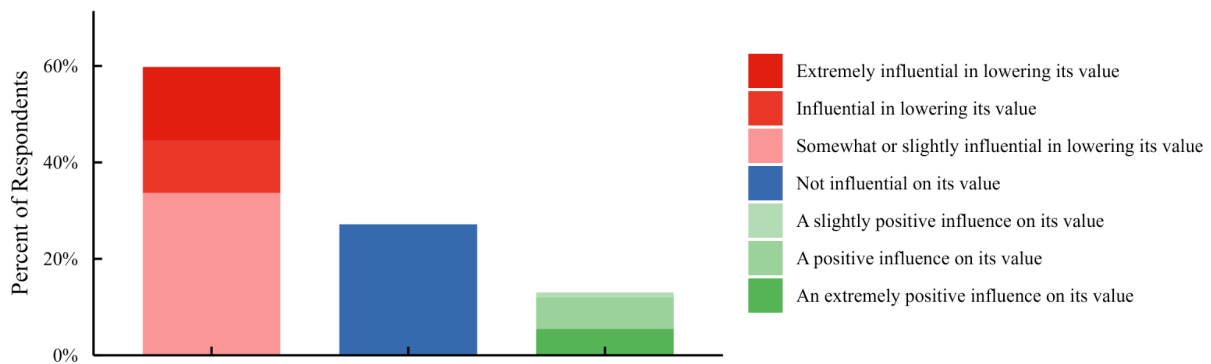


Figure 15: Homeowner respondents’ views on how Port Arthur’s oil, gas, and petrochemical facilities affect their home’s value, out of 92 responses.

What Residents Would Like to See from Industry and Local Government

A chief aim of our survey was to get a better sense from across Port Arthur’s citizenry about what kinds of contributions they’d most welcome now from this local industry that has played such a critical role in the making of Port Arthur. Over the years, local refineries and petrochemical operations have made donations to community-oriented endeavors more or less regularly, supporting endeavors from the United Way to scholarship programs to museums. But so far as we are aware, it has been a long time since local companies made any systematic effort to solicit opinions from local residents themselves about what the priorities for local corporate donations should be.

Especially given what we’ve found about how so many in Port Arthur see declining benefits and rising burdens from this industry, it seems all the more important that companies consider the community’s own priorities as they make current and future decisions about where to channel their generosity.

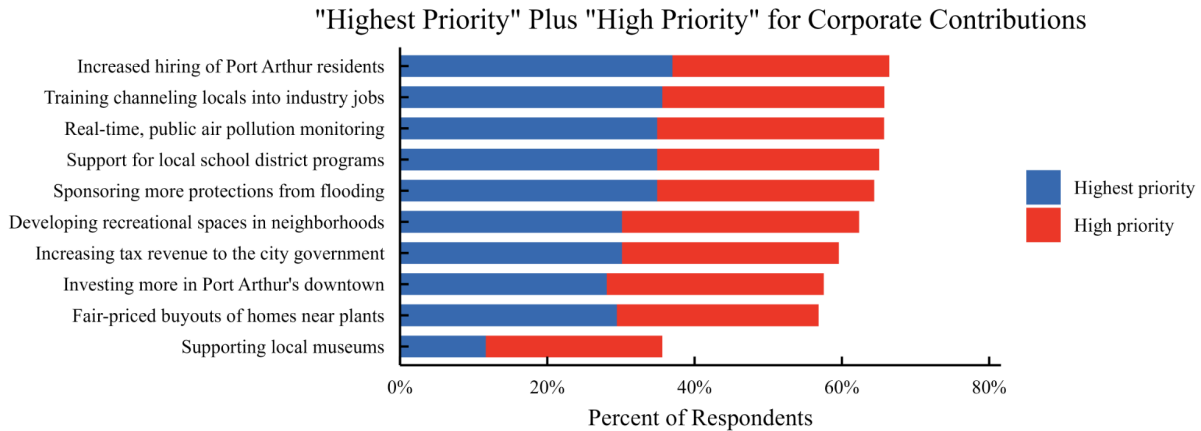


Figure 16: Percent of respondents who saw each possible initiative by Port Arthur’s oil, gas, and petrochemical industry as a high or highest priority for supporting local neighborhoods, out of 146 responses.

Highest Priorities

(more than 60% rated “high” or “highest):

- #1 and #2, Hiring of locals; Job training leading to industry jobs: More local hiring by the refineries and petrochemical plants. While some companies have indeed supported local training programs, residents would like to see such programs expanded, with training that then directly channels trainees into refinery or petrochemical jobs.
- #3, More transparency about local pollution. Following up on the strong concerns they expressed about local air pollution from the refineries and other plants, residents voiced strong support for publicly accessible, real-time monitoring of the air pollutants emitted by local plants.
- #4, Bolstering schools: While some local companies donate to some programs in local school districts, those surveyed are looking for more corporate support and commitments.
- #5, Fortifying protections against flooding. Port Arthur residents largely agree about flooding having gotten worse, and also worry about the problem intensifying in the years ahead through climate change. They’d like to see local companies contribute to flood protection efforts, to bolster what’s being done by local governments.
- #6, Developing recreational spaces in neighborhoods that lack them. Another need faced by multiple neighborhoods in Port Arthur, for which residents would welcome more initiative and investment by local industries.

High Priorities

(rated by 50-60% of those surveyed as “high” or “highest”)

- Increasing the tax and other contributions to local government by oil, gas, and petrochemical plants. For decades, the taxes paid by local industry have been minimized, both through incentives to encourage new or expanded plants and by allowing companies to assess the value of their own properties. Those surveyed would like to see these companies pay a fairer share of what it takes to run local schools, repair roads, and provide other local public services.
- Investing more in Port Arthur’s downtown. For decades, the local oil, gas, and petrochemical industry remained indifferent to the retreat of shops, investment, and commerce from downtown Port Arthur. A few years ago, the Saudi/ARAMCO-owned refinery Motiva bought two downtown buildings to convert into office space. But as that project has stalled, no other companies have followed suit. A majority of local residents surveyed have called for more downtown investments from these companies.
- Fair-priced buyouts of homes near refining and petrochemical plants. Most homeowners in our survey agree that the presence of local industry has lowered the value of their homes, and the city itself assesses neighborhoods nearest these plants as having the lowest value. Those patterns rule out a sales price high enough for them to buy a house elsewhere, especially for those living nearest the plants. Those surveyed strongly support an industry-sponsored or -backed program of fairer-priced buyouts for these homeowners.

Conclusion

Our survey reveals the mixture of opinions that Port Arthur residents hold on their local oil, gas, and petrochemical industry, which for so long has been their city’s economic mainstay. On the one hand, many appreciate the benefits it has brought to their community, even if they themselves don’t work in a plant, even if they think these have been declining in recent years. On the other hand, solid majorities also affirm the burdens it imposes on them, from environmental pollution and climate change to lowered home values. On the whole, the survey sends a message that this community believes that these burdens outweigh the benefits of this long-standing local industry, and that it should give back more. And solid majorities back several of the avenues suggested in our survey for doing so.

Appendix: Genesis and Funding of Survey

To document how and why the EPA environmental agencies have struggled to address “cumulative impacts”—environmental and social burdens shouldered by Port Arthur— as noted earlier we employed traditional historical methods including oral histories, newspaper, documentary, and photographic research. To date, we synthesized this historical material along with ArcGIS mapping of demographic and environmental trends into a multimedia collection using the ArcGIS platform StoryMap that recounts Port Arthur’s history. This strong historical narrative portrays how the petrochemical industry made the city what it is today, including the legacy of illnesses likely due to continuing pollution, low home values, elevated rates of joblessness and poverty, and threats of flooding exacerbated by climate change. However, we have struggled over our StoryMaps’ conclusion, which has directed us to suggest concrete ways forward for this community.

Thus, the genesis of the survey was made possible through the remaining NSF funds and a FAHSS Faculty in the Arts, Humanities and lettered Social Sciences (FAHSS) grant. The goal of the survey was to seek better oversight of refineries’ local tax-paying to increase hiring of local residents, and to improve flood protections. We further realized that to make an effective petition to corporate and political leaders, would be better backed up with a more representative and systematic survey of Port Arthur residents, ascertaining what they most worried about or preferred. The survey was administered online using Qualtrics; in June 2025, after receiving IRB approval, Sellers traveled to Port Arthur to organize the surveyor team. Our initial aim was to collect at least 122 surveys (using a .1 effect size: not so reliable about differences between groups, still valued for overall results in sociological studies). With the assistance of CIDA we planned an on-the-ground recruitment of ~4 community members to conduct the survey, who were trained by the academic team. Over the course of a week, the surveyors solicited survey responses. Each surveyor received \$500 (for attending training plus ~25 surveys); survey participants received \$50. Following an analysis of the survey results, we compiled those results into this short white paper, folded into the concluding section of our StoryMap collection, then rolled out at a community-wide event as well as for local corporate and government audiences.