SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SURVEY 2005

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Public opinion surveys can play an important role in decision making as they gather information that complements data from standard sources such as the Decennial Census and Current Population Survey. This chapter presents several key results from a recently completed survey of Southern California residents (those living in the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura). The information from the survey can help better inform elected officials about the public's concerns and priorities. Here we describe Southern Californians' feelings about the top problems in the region, their perceptions of government efficacy, their feelings about disaster preparedness, and their attitudes about housing, smart growth, and commutes in the region. (Details of the survey can be found in the appendix. Additional results can be found at http://lewis.spa.ucla.edu/special/SocalSurvey/index.cfm).

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA'S TOP PROBLEMS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT EFFICACY

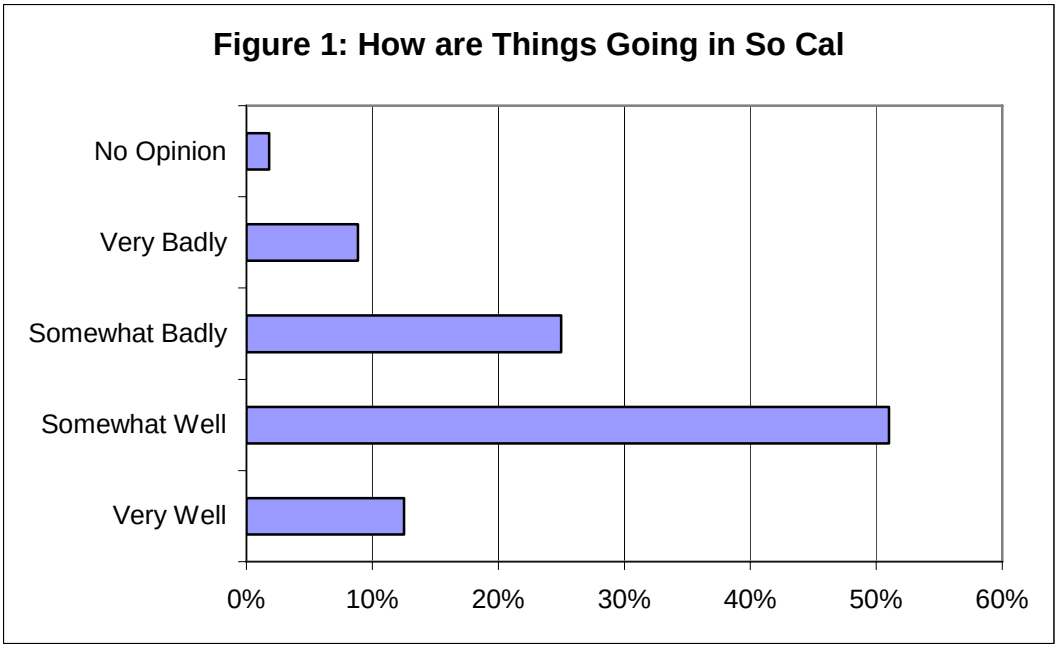
Top Problems

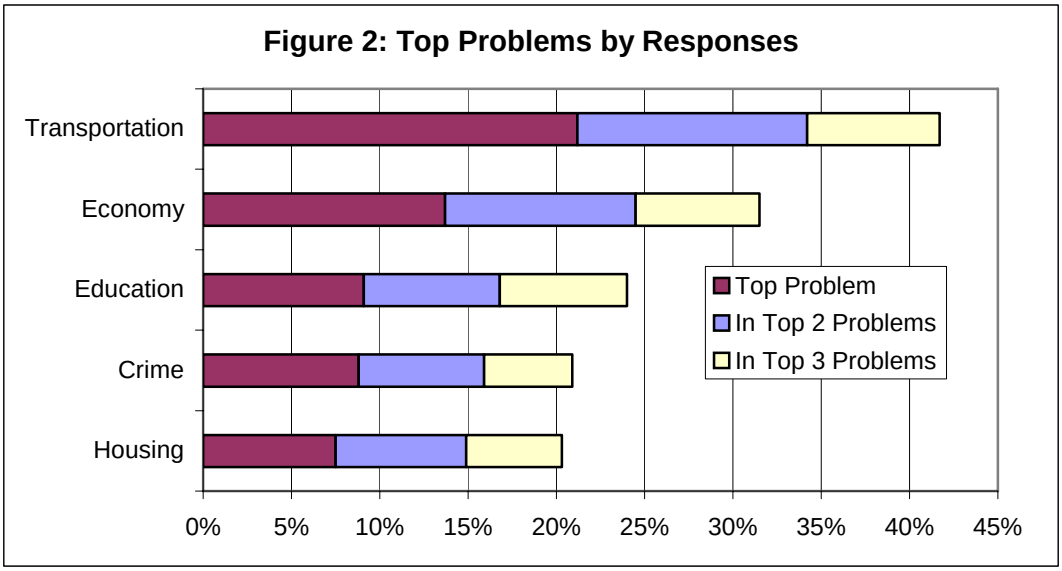
Southern California is in many ways an attractive place to live. Almost three-quarters of survey respondents believe the weather is the best thing about the region, but others also mentioned amenities (both natural and cultural) and services (10%), opportunities, including educational and economic opportunities, among others (9%), and lifestyle (6%). Almost two-thirds of survey respondents also believe that things are going well in the region as far as quality of life is concerned (see Figure 1). Despite these positives, however, residents do have some serious concerns.

The Southern California Survey (referred to hereafter as the SCS) asked respondents to name the three most important problems facing the region. Transportation, economic concerns, education, crime, and housing are the top five problems cited by survey respondents. These problems are all related to life in a large metropolitan area (the Bay Area generally shares the same concerns). Figure 2 displays Southern California's top five problems according to all three responses.

Transportation

The most overwhelming concern in the region is transportation. Although various responses related to transportation were offered, by far the most common response to the





question about the region's most important problem was traffic. Although Southern California does not have the highest average commute times in the U.S., it does stand out for the level of congestion. In terms of the average hours wasted annually per traveler, Los Angeles and Orange counties have the worst congestion of all U.S. metropolitan areas. Riverside and San Bernardino tied for first out of 27 large metro areas, and

Ventura tied for seventh out of 30 medium metro areas. These delays are a major source of frustration in the region.

Economy

The economy is the second most important problem in the region. Within this category employment was the most cited problem. Over the last few years, the regional economy has been in a doldrums. The unemployment rate increased in the early 2000s, from 4.7% in 2000 to 6.1% in 2003, but the increase was not as dramatic as the increase during the early 1990s. In recent months, the Southern California unemployment rate has declined moderately with a 2 percent increase in the employed population from 2003 to 2004. During this period, real per capita income has been relatively flat. This was particularly true in the early 2000s. While the economic slowdown was moderate, the impact was particularly hard on those at the bottom of the income ladder. The average (median) per capita income for the bottom fifth took a much larger hit than for those at the top fifth.

Education

Education is a statewide problem as well as a regional one. A recent study on the state of education in California found that 82 percent of Californians believe the quality of education in the state is at least somewhat of a problem, and 52 percent consider it a big problem, up from 46 percent in 1998 (Public Policy Institute of California, 2005). On a more local level, education was one of the top three issues most important to voters in the recent Los Angeles mayoral election – a city in which the mayor has little control over education (Perry, 2005).

Crime and Housing

Crime and housing round out the list of the top five problems. According to the California Department of Justice, violent crime has actually been declining since the mid-1990s. Statewide, the number of violent crimes decreased 11 percent between 1998 and 2003. The violent crime rate also decreased considerably in each of the five Southern California counties between 1994 and 2003. This has been offset somewhat by a slight increase in property crime (partly due to an increase in the motor vehicle theft rate), but overall the concern with crime seems to belie the statistics.

The lack of affordable housing has also been cited as a statewide problem, and increasingly, a national problem, but it has reached a crisis level in Southern California. Increasing demand for housing has not been met by a corresponding increase in housing production. While many factors have contributed to the affordability problem, continued population growth and an undersupply of new housing has been key.

Particularly over the last fifteen years, as the regional population has continued to increase, the new housing market in Southern California has been dominated by the

suburbanization of construction, with mostly expensive single family homes being built and much fewer multi-family units or smaller, more affordable single unit homes (Ong et al., 2004). The *Los Angeles Times* reported in May 2005 that in Southern California, the median price of a home was $477,660. At the time, the median household income was $52,050, which is $59,320 short of the $111,370 qualifying income needed to buy a median-priced home.

Demographic Breakdown

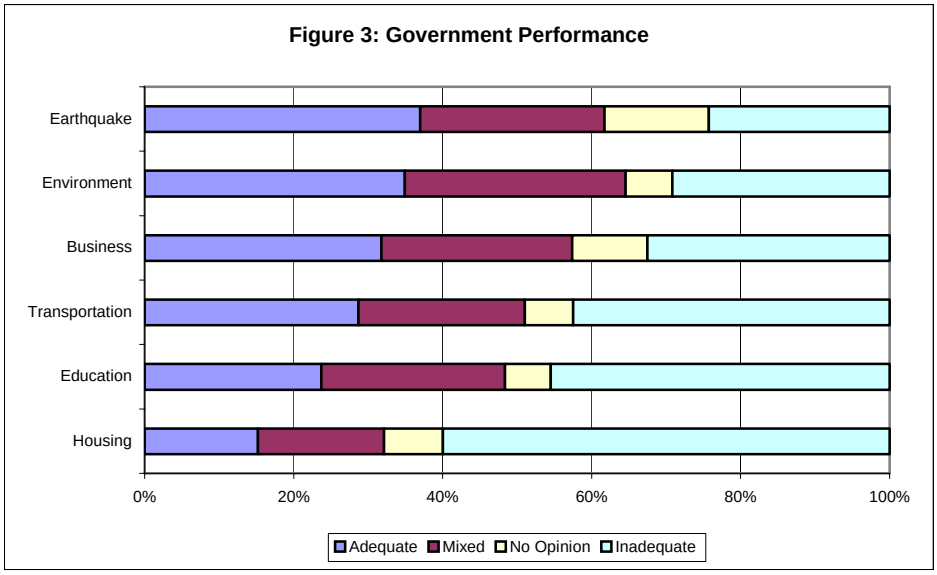
A breakdown of the top three problems according to ethnicity, education, age, and income indicates a high degree of consistency in the perception of problems among demographic groups. There are noticeable differences though. We developed a scoring system to determine the order of importance of problems among groups. We assigned a score to each response depending on whether it was the first, second, or third answer. First answers received a 4, second answers a 2, and third answers a 1. Again, transportation was ranked as a top problem, with economic concerns the second most important problem.

We did see differences in the ranking among Latinos, those with a high school education or less, and those making less than $40,000 per year. These groups ranked economic issues as the most important problem, and transportation second or third. Given that many of the responses related to economics had to do with employment it is not surprising that the groups at the lower end of the income scale ranked the economy first. (As mentioned above, these groups were also the hardest hit by the mild recession of recent years). These groups were also the only ones to list crime as one of the top three problems.

Education was ranked the third most important problem by several groups, including those with some college or higher, those in the middle income category (those in the highest income category ranked education second) and among Whites and "Other" ethnic groups (non-Latinos). Finally, immigration came up as a concern for those 55 and over, and housing was a concern for those in the 36 – 54 age group.

Local Government Efficacy and Trust

The survey asked respondents whether the performance of Southern California's elected officials in several different issue areas has been generally inadequate, mixed, or adequate. Residents are most satisfied with elected officials' performance on earthquake preparedness, protecting the environment, and keeping and attracting business; over 50 percent of respondents indicated that performance on these issues were adequate or mixed. Respondents were slightly less satisfied with performance on improving transportation and education, and very dissatisfied with performance in providing affordable housing in the region (see Figure 3).



Top Problems

When it comes to rating local government performance on the region's top problems, we found that those who cited any of the top three problems were also more critical of their local officials' performance on that particular problem. While overall just over 40 percent of respondents indicated that local officials' performance in improving transportation was "generally inadequate," that percentage jumped to 54 percent among those who had cited transportation as a major problem. For those who rated economic issues as a top problem, the percentage who rated officials' performance in keeping and attracting business investment in the region as inadequate was 39 percent, versus 33 percent for all respondents. For education, the percentage of people who indicated officials' performance in improving education was "inadequate" jumped significantly among those most concerned, from 45 percent overall to 63 percent.

Respondents were most disappointed with local officials' performance in improving affordable housing in the region. While 60 percent responded with "generally inadequate" overall, that number jumped to almost 80 percent among those who cited housing as a major problem. We did not ask respondents to rate local officials' performance on crime.

Confidence

The survey also gauged the level of confidence residents have in their local governments.

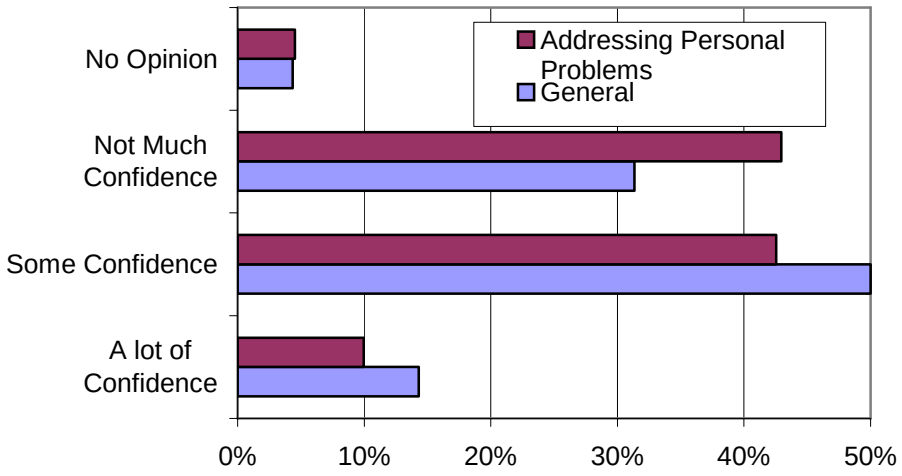
Overall Americans' trust in government has been declining since the 1950s. The Pew Research Center has found that distrust of the federal government is strongly linked to how people feel about the state of the nation, or the "national mood." Both of these measures dropped sharply during the 1960s and early 1970s during Vietnam and Watergate, and remained low throughout the rest of the 1970s, an era of high inflation and unemployment. Trust and ratings of the state of the nation increased slightly during

the Reagan era, but then dropped again after the Iran-Contra Scandal. Both measures have fluctuated since then, but have not nearly returned to the levels of the early 1960s (Pew, 1998). In a 1992 national poll taken by the U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR), local government got higher ratings than the state or federal governments, although all three levels had lower ratings than in 1987. Those expressing "a great deal" of trust and confidence in local government had dropped by ten points, to six percent, while those expressing "not very much" trust and confidence in local government increased by ten points, to 26 percent. This level was still much lower than the 41 percent who expressed "not very much" trust in the federal government and the 36 percent who answered the same in regard to state governments (ACIR 1992).

The California Field Poll indicates that statewide, confidence in local government did not change between 1984 and 1997. In those years respondents were asked whether they had "a lot of confidence, some confidence, or not much confidence" in their local government. The percent of respondents stating they had a lot of confidence in local government was 18.7 percent in 1984 and 19.6 percent in 1997. Those who stated "not much confidence" increased from 19.8 to 22.2 percent (not a significant increase given the margin of error) while those respondents stating "some confidence" remained at 58 percent.

Figure 4 displays the responses to two questions about confidence in local government. The SCS asked about general confidence and confidence in local government's ability to solve the problems that most affect each respondent's household or family. Southern California residents tend to have higher levels of general confidence in local government than in its ability to solve problems that affect them personally. Almost two-thirds of respondents have at least some confidence in local government generally, as opposed to just slightly over half who report some degree of confidence in local government's ability to solve the problems that affect them personally.

Figure 4: Confidence in Local Government



To compare confidence levels among demographic groups and in different areas of the region we calculated confidence scores based on the responses to both of the confidence questions. (Differences in average confidence scores for education, income, and age were not significant). We found that Whites and Latinos have higher confidence scores than those in other ethnic groups. Los Angeles County residents have lower confidence scores than those in the Inland Empire (San Bernardino and Riverside counties) and other areas (Ventura and Orange counties).

CIVIL SOCIETY IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND TRUST

Community Engagement

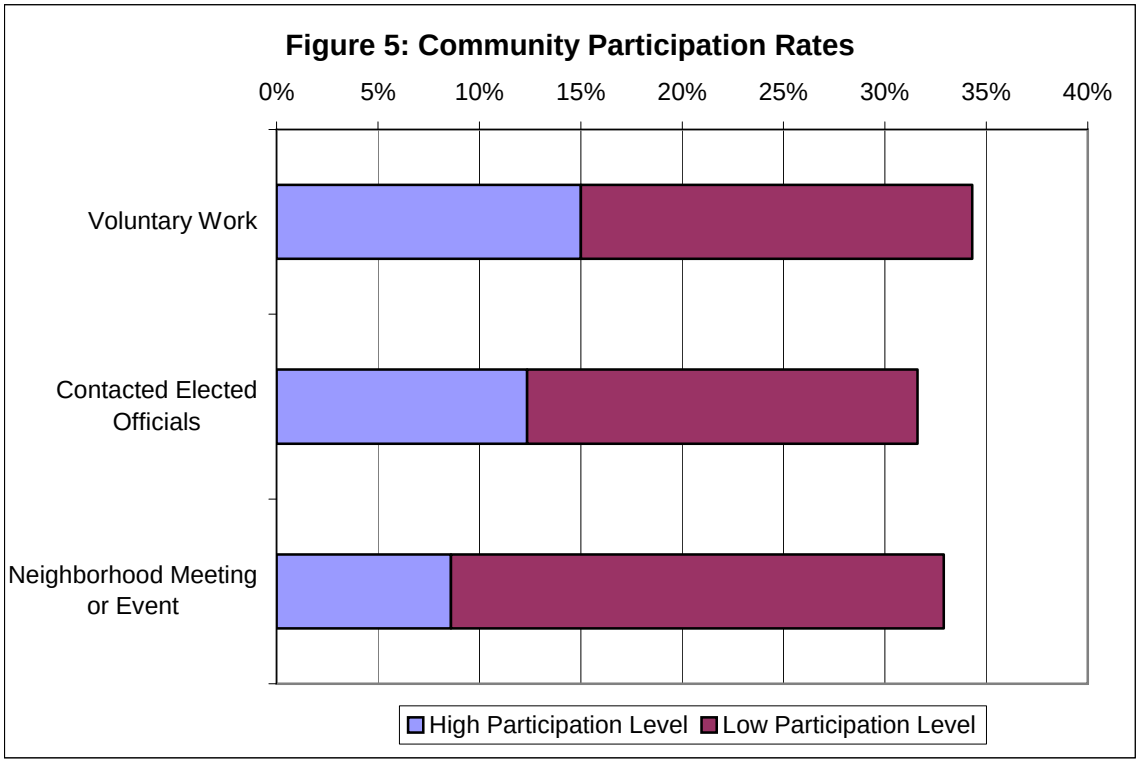
In addition to informing policymakers, results from the Southern California Survey (SCS) are also useful for helping the residents of this region gain insight into who they are as a community. In particular, the information can tell us the degree to which we interact with others – with elected officials, neighbors, or those we meet through volunteer work. These are all aspects of what can be considered community engagement. One key result from the survey is that a majority of Southern California residents are engaged in their community.

Interest in the study of community engagement has increased over the past decade, particularly with the popularity of works by Robert Putnam (see for example, *Bowling Alone: Collapse and Revival of the American Community*, 2000). Putnam's work describes the decline in civic engagement and community ties over the course of the last generation, and the importance of these ties for healthy communities, strong economies, and strong democracy. While civic engagement refers more to political participation, community engagement comes in many forms, including church attendance, volunteering, donating money, and attending community meetings and events. Others have noted that community engagement varies by socioeconomic status and ethnicity (Public Policy Institute of California, 2004; *Social Capital Benchmark Survey*, 2000).

It is likely that those with a higher socioeconomic status have more social networks for participation, as well as higher levels of efficacy, which in turn promote participation. Those with a lower socioeconomic status may lack the time, networks, and even the knowledge of how to contact officials, get involved in neighborhood events, or find out about volunteer opportunities. In addition, their communities may lack institutions that promote engagement. Here we look at the level of community engagement in various secular activities in Southern California, and how it can vary by demographic characteristics.

Good News/Bad News

The good news is that 59 percent of Southern California residents have participated in at least one of the following three activities over the past twelve months: volunteering, contacting an elected official, or attending a neighborhood meeting. Almost 35 percent have done voluntary work, 32 percent have contacted an elected official, and 33 percent have attended a neighborhood-wide meeting or event. If we look at California as a whole, for comparison, only 28 percent of Californians have done volunteer work in the past twelve months, while 29 percent have written to an elected official, and 39 percent have attended a meeting on local or school affairs in the last year[1] (Public Policy Institute of California, 2004). In Southern California we also found that 20 percent of residents participate in two or more of these activities, and ten percent engaged in all three. However, when we distinguished between "high" and "low" participation, the engagement levels dropped by half or more (see Figure 5). We defined "high" participation for volunteering as 40 or more hours in the past twelve months, and for contacting elected officials and attending a neighborhood meeting as at least once per quarter.



We also looked at how "engaged" residents are in Southern Californian by creating an index which takes into account the number and intensity of engagements. We determined the median level of engagement in each of the three activities. We then assigned each respondent an engagement score; a 1 if participation was below the median and a 2 if it was above. We summed these scores for a total engagement score on a scale of 0 (no engagement) to 6 (highest engagement). A score of 1-2 was considered "low" and a score of 3-6 was considered "high." We determined that of the 59 percent of

Southern Californians who are engaged, 34 percent are considered "low" engagement and 25 percent are considered "high" engagement.

Socioeconomic Groups

We looked at variations in engagement by socioeconomic groups. Our results are consistent with the results of the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, which found very different rates of social participation (and other forms of participation) among different social strata. We found that while only ten percent of those with a high school education or less received a high engagement score, 40 percent of those with a bachelor's degree or higher are highly engaged. Results are similar for income. Those making more than $80,000 per year are two and half times as likely to be highly engaged as those making less than $40,000. High engagement, as well as engagement in general, increases as education and income increase. Whites are also much more engaged than other ethnic groups. However, when we adjust for the socioeconomic differences between whites and other groups, the differences decrease significantly. The differences in engagement between whites and Latinos dropped by half when adjusting for these differences, and by two thirds when looking only at high engagement. The gap between whites and other groups[2], while not as large, also dropped significantly after adjusting for SES.

Finally, we examined community engagement levels by church attendance and non-religious donations (also forms of community engagement) to see if these activities substitute, complement, or are independent of each other. We found no statistically significant difference in engagement levels between those who attend church regularly and those who attend rarely or not at all. These two activities operate independently of each other. However, among those who donate to non-religious organizations, there is a substantial difference in participation rates. Those who donated $251 or more to a non-religious organization over the past twelve months were almost twice as likely to be engaged, and more than twice as likely to be highly engaged, than those who donated nothing at all. So donating money does not just substitute for time spent in community activities, but actually indicates a higher level of engagement in general.

Trust

The survey also looked at how trusting residents are in Southern California. Trust can mean many different things, but one important definition is a belief held by an individual that he or she can rely on the future reciprocal actions of others. In more common terms, it is faith that others will follow through on an explicit or implicit agreement, or adhere to prevailing social and group norms and values.

Trust is important because it facilitates collective action, group cooperation and inter-personal exchange without requiring immediate payoff. Individuals with trust have confidence in information they receive from their network of family members, friends, acquaintances, and professional associates. Trust can exist in many societal domains, but it is particularly critical in civil society, which lacks the legal means of the public sector or competitive mechanisms of economic markets to enforce agreements. In short, Trust

is a fundamental characteristic associated with community cohesion. For many social scientists, trust is an essential element in social capital, that intangible but nonetheless critical form of capital that potentially shapes economic and political outcomes.

Trust in Decline

Trust, however, is not a given. In recent years, there has been growing concern about a decline in people's trust of others and the role that plays in a waning of civic engagement and community ties. Another important concern is a low level of trust within some ethnic groups and economic classes. Trust appears to be correlated with life chances and opportunities. While it is evident that trust is associated with economic, social, and political behavior, there is debate about whether trust affects or is affected by these factors. It is likely that the effects go in both directions. Although it is impossible to answer this fundamental question with the survey data, it is still useful to examine the prevalence of trust, its relationship to other items in the survey, and its variation across groups.

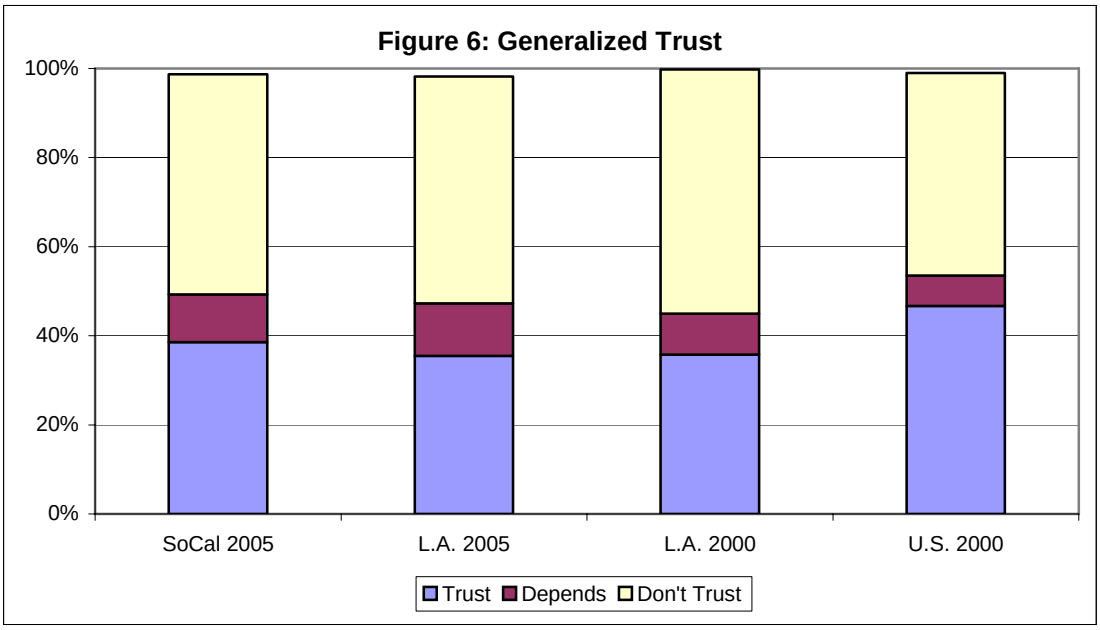
The available data from our survey and other surveys indicate substantial variation over time and across communities in the proportion that trusts others. The most widely used survey question related to trust is, "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?" This question, or ones with slight variations in wording, is designed to capture the most generalized aspect of trust in others. Statistics from the General Social Survey provide an overview of the national trend. There has been a secular decline in the relative number of persons who responded positively to this question (i.e., they generally trust others). Since the mid-1990s, the percentage has hovered in the mid-30s.

Geographic Variation

Results from the 2000 Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey show enormous variations across communities in the relative number of those trusting others. The community with the highest proportion (75%) is comprised of parts of rural South Dakota, while the community with the lowest proportion (35%) is the greater Houston area. Overall, smaller communities tend to have proportionately more trusting respondents than do larger metropolitan areas. Moreover, disadvantaged neighborhoods within a given geographic area report rates at or below the one-third mark. Among the communities (that is, excluding neighborhoods), Los Angeles County is second from the bottom, with only 36%, which is one percentage point lower than the greater Atlanta area. It is worth noting that Los Angeles County is the largest community included in the survey, and its low rate is likely to be influenced by its large population size, as well as its ethnic diversity and sizeable immigrant population.

The percentages from the SCS are comparable to those from the 2000 Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey. In 2005, 39 percent of the respondents stated that they generally trust others, while 49 percent said that they did not. Another 11 percent stated that trust depended on the situation, and one percent did not give a

response. Residents in Los Angeles County are slightly less trusting, but the difference is only marginally statistically significant. Figure 6 compares the results from the 2005 and 2000 surveys for the county, along with the overall results for Southern California in 2005 and for the nation in 2000. The two sets of statistics are remarkably similar.



As we have just noted, generalized trust is related to other opinions including opinions about the efficacy of government and likelihood of a terrorist act. The former has been a bread-and-butter item in public opinion surveys, while the latter has emerged as a recent concern following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C. The association with assessments of the public sector can be seen in the percentages who have confidence in local government. Southern Californians who trust others are one and a half times as likely to have confidence in local government than those who do not trust. The former group also tends to believe we live in a safer world. They are one and a half times more likely to believe that there will not be an act of terrorism in Southern California in the next two years.

Trust and Engagement

Southern Californians who trust others are over twice as likely to engage in community activities than those who do not trust, indicating a correlation between trust and behavior in civil society. The former group is also more likely to make a monetary donation to non-religious charities, organizations, or causes. Those who trust are twice as likely to have donated $500 or more in the past twelve months. Although these associations are significant, it is important to note that the results do not indicate causality. It is likely that many of the same underlying factors that increase the likelihood of trusting also affect opinions about government, safety, volunteerism, and giving.

Socioeconomic and Demographic Groups

Finally, it is useful to examine variations in trust by socioeconomic and demographic groups. Education is a form of human capital and is related to both earnings and social status. We find that those with a bachelor's degree are over twice as likely to trust others than those with a high school education or less. A more direct measure of economic status is household income, and using this variable produces disparities similar to those for educational attainment. Those in high-income households are over twice as likely to trust others than those in low-income households.

There are also variations in generalized trust by demographic characteristics, although the differences are not as large. Younger respondents are less likely to trust than are others. The difference is over one and a half times. Moreover, relatively fewer minorities fall into the trust category. The difference between whites and Latinos is between one and a half time and two times.

The above variations by socioeconomic and demographic characteristics are significant, and the patterns are consistent with the interpretation that trust is embedded in the structure of opportunity. Those who benefit from societal institutions and the economy have the means to participate in a larger range of organizations and networks. Moreover, the public sector and civic institutions are more responsive to their needs. Both phenomena encourage trust in what is effectively a supportive and rewarding structure. On the other hand, the opposite holds for those who have to struggle to make ends meet and are on the margins of society and economy. Increasing generalized trust is a worthwhile public policy goal, but this may require paying attention to some more fundamental problems facing this region.

PREPARING FOR DISASTER – EARTHQUAKES AND TERRORISM

Earthquakes

California has the distinction of having the most damaging earthquakes in the United States (it shares with Alaska the honors for most earthquakes). Each year the Southern California region has about 10,000 earthquakes, according to the USGS. Most are small; only about 15 to 20 are greater than magnitude 4.0. However, in January 1994 the Los Angeles area was hit by the 6.7 magnitude Northridge quake, the first earthquake to hit directly an urban area in the United States since 1933. According to reports, the damage from the quake was extensive. Over 50 people died and more than 9,000 were injured. Freeway sections, parking lots, and office buildings collapsed, while several apartment buildings were severely damaged. More than 20,000 were displaced from their homes (SCEDC). Estimates of the damage are in the $20 billion range, making Northridge the most costly earthquake in U.S. history.

The California Geological Survey (CGS), as required by the Seismic Hazards Mapping Act, must designate risk zones in both Northern California (the Bay Area) and Southern California (the Greater Los Angeles area, including both Ventura and Orange).

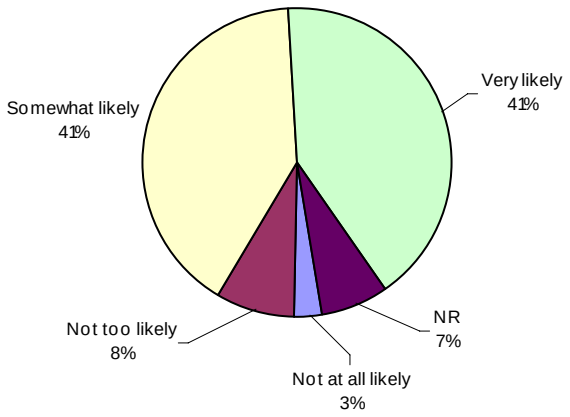
These risk zones are designated as either Landslide Zones, Liquefaction Zones, or both, based upon the local land's propensity to either slide or liquefy during an earthquake.[3] By merging data on liquefaction and landslide zones with U.S. Census block level population data, it is possible to roughly estimate the number of people who live on or very near these hazard zones. The hazard data exists in Southern California only for Los Angeles, Orange, and Ventura counties and so counts were only tabulated for these three counties, rather than for the more general five-county region.

By land area, liquefaction zones make up 12.0 percent of Los Angeles county, 27.5 percent of Orange County, and 11.5 percent of Ventura County, while landslide zones represent 10.8 percent, 16.5 percent, and 17.9 percent of those counties' respective land areas[4]. The percentage of land area that represented hazard zones was calculated for each census block (the smallest census geography available) and an arbitrary break point of 90 percent land area in one of the hazard zones was set. The difference between populations living near landslide zones versus living near liquefaction zones was very clear.

Only 0.06 percent of the population of Los Angeles County lived within those blocks that had more than 90 percent of their area in landslide zones; the same percentages for Orange and Ventura were, respectively, 0.32 percent and 0.04 percent. These combined for a grand total of just over 15,000 people. On the other hand, 31.2 percent of the population of Los Angeles County – representing almost 3 million people (2,970,500) – are living within or very near liquefaction hazard zones. For Orange and Ventura counties, respectively, 41.9 percent and 44.8 percent of the populations lived in such blocks (representing 1,192,426 and 337,018 people).

Although scientists are not able to predict a major earthquake, based on probabilities they do estimate that in the next 30 years there is a 60 percent chance that there will be a major quake in Southern California (USGS). The vast majority of Southern Californians believe we will have a major quake even sooner. Over 80 percent think it is likely we will have a major quake in the next five years (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Likelihood of a Major Earthquake in So. CA in Next Five Years



(For comparison, only 60 percent think a terrorist attack is likely in the next two years). However, residents were split almost evenly on whether or not such a quake would cause personal harm.

Southern Californians are confident in their local government's ability to respond to a major earthquake. Over 80 percent have at least a fair amount of confidence that their local government will respond quickly and effectively in the aftermath of a quake. And 38 percent felt their local officials were doing a generally adequate job of preparing for a major quake. Only 24 percent thought they were doing an inadequate job. (Another quarter gave a mixed response, while the remainder did not know or did not respond). And residents themselves are preparing for a large quake – 65 percent said they had an emergency preparedness kit at home.

Concerns about the likelihood of a major earthquake, and opinions about government response to, and preparedness for, earthquakes, are issues that cut across ethnic and class lines. We found virtually no differences in the perceived likelihood of a major earthquake according to demographic characteristics. Eighty five to ninety percent of residents in each demographic group think a major earthquake is "likely" in the next five years regardless of age, race, education, or income.

In addition, most Southern California residents have confidence in their local government's ability to respond quickly and effectively in the aftermath of a major earthquake. Again, 80 to 90 percent of respondents in each demographic group had at least a fair amount of confidence in the earthquake response capabilities of their local government. When asked about their local officials' performance in preparing for a major earthquake in the region, a majority still give either a "mixed" or "generally adequate" response. But here we do see some slight differences among groups by income and ethnicity.

While 53 percent of those making $80,000 per year or more say their local officials are doing a "generally adequate" job of preparing for an earthquake, only 38 percent of those making $40,000 - $80,000 and 41 percent of those making less than $40,000 offered this response. Whites also were slightly more likely to give local officials higher marks for earthquake preparedness; 49 percent of whites think their officials are doing a "generally adequate" job, versus only 37 percent of Latinos and 42 percent of those in other ethnic groups. However, those groups who gave government higher marks for earthquake preparedness were also more likely to be prepared themselves.

For example, 77 percent of those in the highest income category reported having an emergency preparedness kit at home, versus 65 percent of those in the middle income category and 56 percent of those in the lowest income category. Whites were also most likely to have an emergency kit at home (72 percent) while Latinos were least likely to have one (54 percent). Their own levels of preparedness may factor into their ratings of local government preparedness, along with their overall perception of neighborhood services. This outcome may be a result of the highly segregated nature of Southern California's communities. Higher income neighborhoods and cities, which also tend to

be whiter than other areas, undoubtedly receive better services in general. As for other demographic differences in emergency preparedness, only 53 percent of those with a high school degree or less had an emergency preparedness kit at home, versus 69 percent of those with some college or higher. And finally, those over 35 were more likely to have an emergency kit than younger residents.

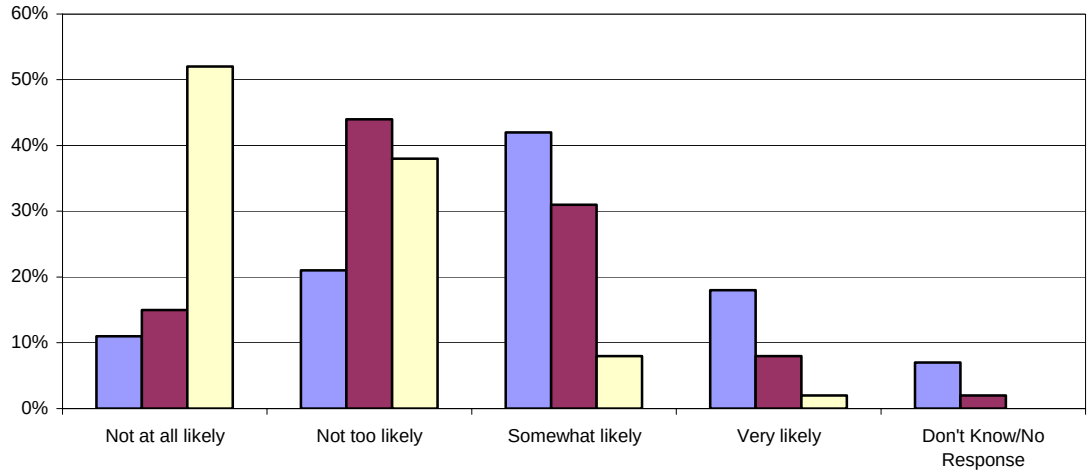
Terrorism

A poll done by the Field Institute in 2002 indicated that an overwhelmingly majority of Californians (86%) believe that there will likely be a terrorist attack somewhere in the United States in the near future, while a somewhat smaller percentage (69%) believe that a similar event will occur within California (The Field Poll, Release #2049). Although many in the state have downplayed the events of 9/11, believing that the country has done much to improve its primary response to acts of terrorism (fire and police), respondents believe that we are still lagging in such areas as computer security, health care emergency response, and border security (The Field Poll, Release #2054; *Los Angeles Times* Poll 9/2/02). Los Angeles World Airport is also considered a prime terrorist target. In 2001 a suspect was arrested in a plot to bomb the airport on the eve of the millennium. Modernization plans for LAX have also been held up by concerns about how best to increase security.

The results of the SCS indicate that a majority of Southern California residents believe it is likely that there will be at least one act of terrorism in the region in the next two years (see Figure 8). We compared these results to a nationwide *CNN/USA Today*, Gallup Poll undertaken at about the same time. Although the CNN Poll asked about the likelihood of a terrorist attack in the U.S. over the next several weeks (not years), the results were the opposite of what we found for Southern California. A majority of Americans felt that an attack was not likely. When asked how likely it was that there would be an act of terrorism in their own community over the next several weeks, only ten percent of Americans thought such an attack was likely. These results are similar to polls taken in 2002 in which Californians also thought it was more likely there would be terrorist attacks in the U.S. in the near future than did Americans in general (86 percent versus 56 percent respectively). In the same poll over two-thirds of Californians thought it was likely there would be a terrorist attack in their own state in the near future (CA Field Poll, July 2002).

The survey results are interesting in light of a poll taken of city officials in California by the Public Policy Institute of California in 2002. The poll found that "local officials in California do not seem as concerned about potential terrorist strikes as their counterparts in the rest of the nation" as reflected in the level of emergency planning. Apparently city officials in California are less concerned about terrorist attacks than is the public. While Southern Californians are more concerned about the likelihood of a terrorist attack than are Americans in general, they are both equally worried about themselves or their families becoming victims of terrorism. A little over a third of respondents from both polls are worried about becoming victims of terrorism, while about sixty percent are not.

Figure 8: Likelihood of Terrorist Attack in Next Two Years (SoCal) or Next Several Weeks (U.S., Your Community)



Source: Lewis Center, CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll,7-9, 2005, Nationwide

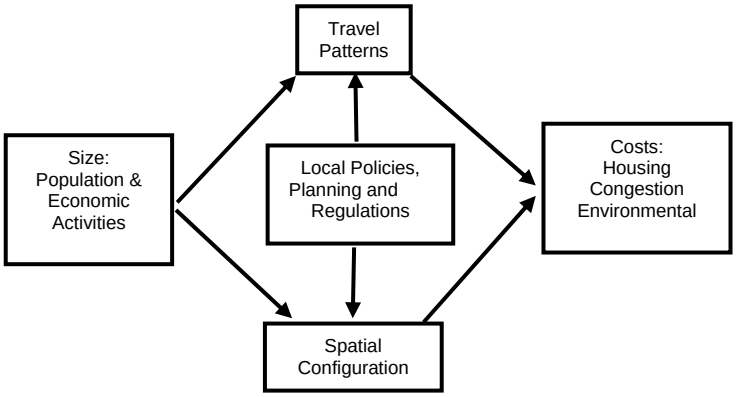
Certain groups appear to be more concerned about the likelihood of a terrorist attack than others. Latinos are more inclined to think a terrorist attack is likely (72 percent) than are whites (62 percent) or other ethnic groups (64 percent). Of those respondents making less than $40,000 per year, 76 percent believe an attack is likely in the next two years, versus only 59 percent of those making $80,000 or more. The percentages are similar when we look at education – 76 percent of those with only a high school education or less believe an attack is likely, versus only 56 percent of those with a B.A. or higher.

Although there is less concern about becoming a victim of an act of terrorism, the differences between the groups was even greater. Latinos were more than twice as likely as whites to be worried about becoming a victim of a terrorist attack. Those making less than $40,000 per year were twice as likely to be concerned as those making more than $80,000. Similarly, those with a high school degree or less were twice as likely to be worried about becoming a victim of a terrorist attack as those with a BA or higher. Finally, younger respondents are more worried about becoming victims than are older respondents.

Overall, Southern California residents are fairly satisfied with the preparedness of their local officials. Only about a quarter of respondents feel that officials have done an inadequate job of preparing for a terrorist attack or have little or no confidence in their local governments ability to respond. A majority feel that local officials have done a generally adequate (36 percent) or mixed (21 percent) job of preparing for an attack, and over two-thirds have confidence in local governments' ability to respond.

In evaluating government efficacy in dealing with terrorism, we looked specifically at those respondents who felt that such an attack was likely in the next two years. These respondents were evenly split on whether local officials are adequately

Figure 9: Main Determinants of Regional Costs



preparing for a possible terrorist attack. One-third said their local officials' performance was "generally adequate" while another third said it was "generally inadequate." About a quarter had mixed feelings on the issue and the remaining ten percent did not know or did not respond. There was more confidence in local government's ability to respond after an attack. These results were very similar to the results for all respondents to this question. While only 20 percent had "a great deal" of confidence, over 70 percent had some degree of confidence, versus only 28 percent who had only some or none at all.

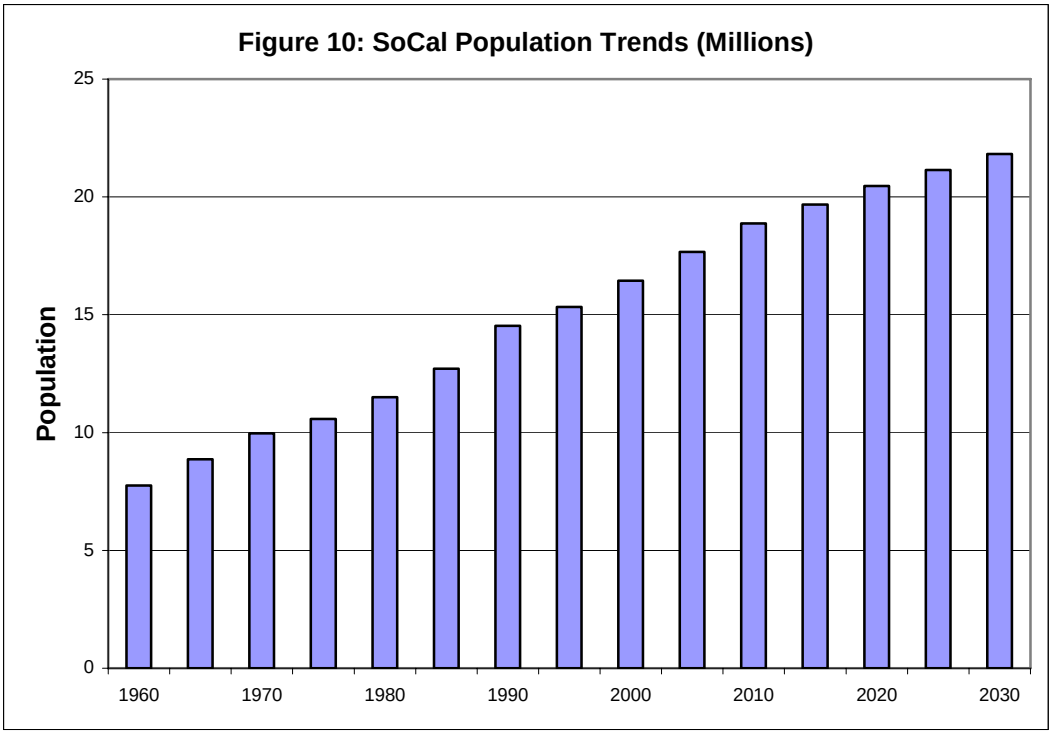
SMART GROWTH, HOUSING, AND COMMUTES

Smart Growth

Traffic congestion is always a popular topic in Southern California, and in recent years the housing market has become a hot topic as well. Smart growth strategies have emerged as a possible way to deal with high housing costs and traffic congestion in the region. In this section we present the results of questions about NIMBYism and development, housing affordability, and perceptions of congestion in the region.

In recent years, there has been an increasing call for using smart growth strategies to address traffic congestion, high housing costs and air pollution in this region. Unquestionably, these problems are generated by fundamental demographic and economic forces tied to the region's size (see Figure 9). Size matters because it requires more land to house residents and firms, generates more travel to connect people and places, and pushes land prices higher in response to greater demand.

The problems have grown with the population, which increased from about 7.8 million in 1960 to 17.7 million in 2005. They will worsen as the region adds another 3.5 million over the next 25 years (see Figure 10). Growth, however, is not inherently bad because it is the product of a vibrant economy that creates employment and business opportunities. But, it comes with associated costs. Size determines both travel patterns and the overall geographic configuration, but growth is not the sole cause of higher costs. Local policies, planning and regulations influence how efficiently the region organizes the locations of its population and economic activities.



Accommodating growth can be difficult. One problem confronting most residents daily is traffic. Congestion, however, is only one part of three inter-related outcomes. There is also an "affordability crisis" because of the high cost of housing, which in turn is due to extremely high land prices (Ong et al., 2004; Glaeser and Gyourko, 2003). And although Southern California has made remarkable progress in cleaning the air, but the region is still listed by EPA as the worst in the nation, with much of the pollution coming from mobile sources (Winer, 2005).

For a growing number of urban analysts, the triumvirate of woes is due in part to a geographically inefficient configuration that unduly contributes to sprawl and over reliance on the automobile. The alternative is to promote more compact development based on mixed land uses, an approach that comes under the term used earlier – "Smart Growth. But it also includes alternatives such as the New Urbanism and Transit-oriented Planning (Zasloff, 2003; *The Planning Report*, 2004).

Smart Growth comprises a wide range of strategies, but two important elements are denser housing developments and allowing retailing close to residential areas. This type of urban design would reduce vehicle trips and provide more affordable housing. Of course, these two strategies by themselves are not a panacea for the region, but they can contribute to alleviating some of the problems at the margin.

The NIMBY Problem

Implementing smart growth, however, runs up against neighborhood opposition, also known as "not in my backyard" resistance, or NIMBYism. Compact residential

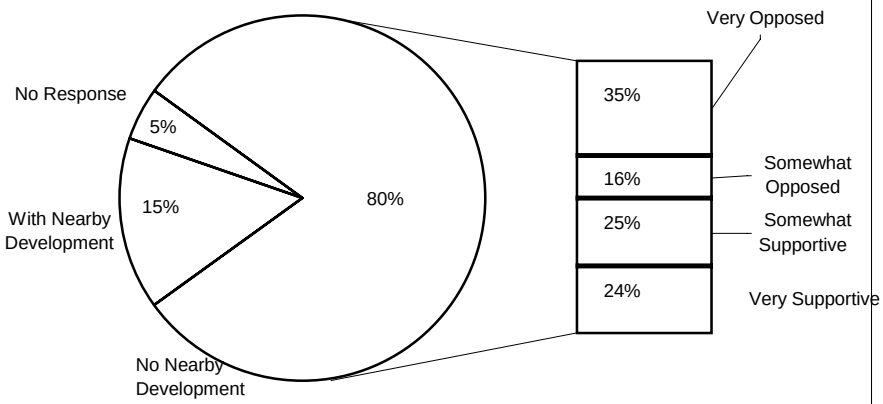
development must include some multi-family housing. But this type of development is seen as one of the least desirable and most difficult to approve, in part because of pressure from local residents (Lewis and Neiman, 2002).

People are willing to encourage commercial development but not close by (The Field Institute, 2002; Mueller and Mueller, 2005). These reactions are understandable because large-scale development can generate potential disruptions caused by traffic, thus adversely affecting housing values. While this is individually rational, it makes it difficult to implement important elements of Smart Growth planning.

The SCS gauges the level of support and opposition to two elements of smart growth through two questions. The first is "How supportive would you be of development of a multi-unit apartment complex two blocks from your home?" Figure 11 summarizes the responses for those who do not already have such a development nearby. Among this group, a slight majority stated that they are opposed to such a proposed project. However, we cannot say with a high degree of certainly that this majority exists due to the inherent limitations of estimates based on a sample of the population. Statistically, there is about a two-in-three chance that the majority of the population holds this view.

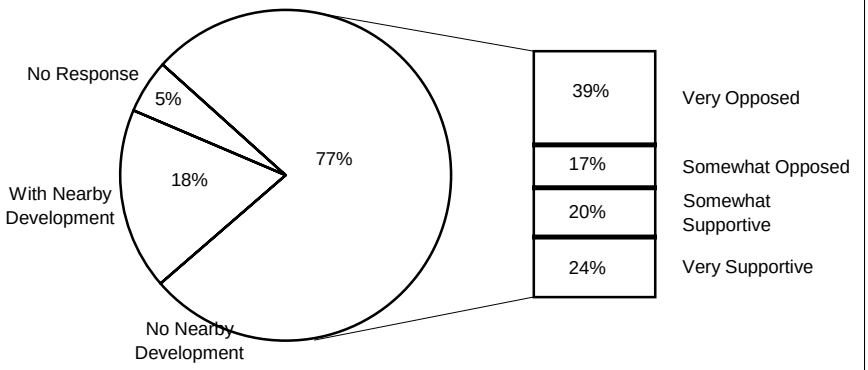
While Southern Californians are fairly evenly split on this question, those who are opposed are more likely to feel strongly about their position than those who are supportive. This difference in the strength of views is statistically significant. NIMBYs are thus likely to oppose development actively. Others in the community who might favor development may be more passive.

Figure 11: Response to Proposed Nearby Apartment Development



The second question is "How supportive would you be of development of a large commercial retail center two blocks from your home?" Figure 12 summarizes the responses for those who do not already have such a development nearby. Among this group, a statistically significant majority stated that they are opposed to such a proposed project. Moreover, those who are opposed are likely to feel more strongly about their position than those who are supportive.

Figure 12: Response to Proposed Nearby Retailing Development



Finally, the survey data provide information on the locus of opposition. Homeowners, those in households with above average income ($60,000 or more), voters, and established residents (residing in the current home for five or more years) are most opposed. These are the groups that have a greater stake in preserving the quality of their neighborhood. A sizeable majority of each group opposes having a multi-unit apartment complex nearby, with homeowners showing the greatest resistance. Even larger majorities oppose having a large commercial retail center nearby, with homeowners showing the greatest resistance.

Resistance to Smart Growth

The pattern of the responses helps explain why it is so difficult to implement smart growth strategies when they require everyone to make some sacrifice. There are strong pockets of resistance to higher residential density and mixed land use. Although opposition may vary according to the type of neighborhood, and whether or not it is near more pedestrian oriented development already, in general opposition is concentrated within the groups with the greatest economic and political leverage. The result is that developments that are seen as undesirable tend to be pushed into neighborhoods at the other end of the economic and political spectrum. The end effect is a regional configuration that is inefficient, and also inequitable.

Housing

Over the last five years the housing market has been very dynamic, with a significant number of households changing residences. However, high and rapidly increasing home prices have created a significant barrier to home ownership. The housing market is very fluid because Southern Californians are very mobile.

In 2000, about a fifth of all households moved into their homes within the last 12 months, and about half of all households had been in their homes for five years or less. The proportions for this region are very similar to those for the nation as a whole in 2000 and those from the 2005 SCS. While homeowners do not change residences as often, approximately two-fifths moved within the last five years. According to the findings, first-time homeowners (those who had been renters) comprise about half of those who purchased a home within the last five years. Among owners who have lived in their homes for five years or less, 48 percent had previously been renters.

Housing Prices

Housing prices in Southern California are among the highest in the nation, and this fact has kept the region's home ownership rate below the national rate. Table 1 provides some basic housing statistics for the two geographic units from the 2003 American Community Survey. Median household income in Southern California is slightly higher than for the United States, but median housing value is over twice as high. While median gross rent is higher here than for the nation, the relative difference in the rental market is smaller than in the housing sector. The fourth and fifth rows normalize median housing value and gross rent by median income. The statistics indicate that home ownership is far less affordable in Southern California than in the United States, and within this region, less affordable than renting; consequently, it is not surprising that home ownership rate is lower for this region than for the nation.

Table 1: Basic Housing Characteristics, 2003

	So Cal	U.S.	So Cal/U.S
Median Household Income	$47,077	$43,564	1.08
Median Housing Value	$318,834	$147,275	2.16
Median Gross Rent	$866	$679	1.28
Housing Value to Income Ratio	6.68	3.38	1.98
Rent to Income Ratio	0.22	0.19	1.18
Home Ownership Rate	55.7%	66.8%	0.83

Source: 2003 American Community Survey

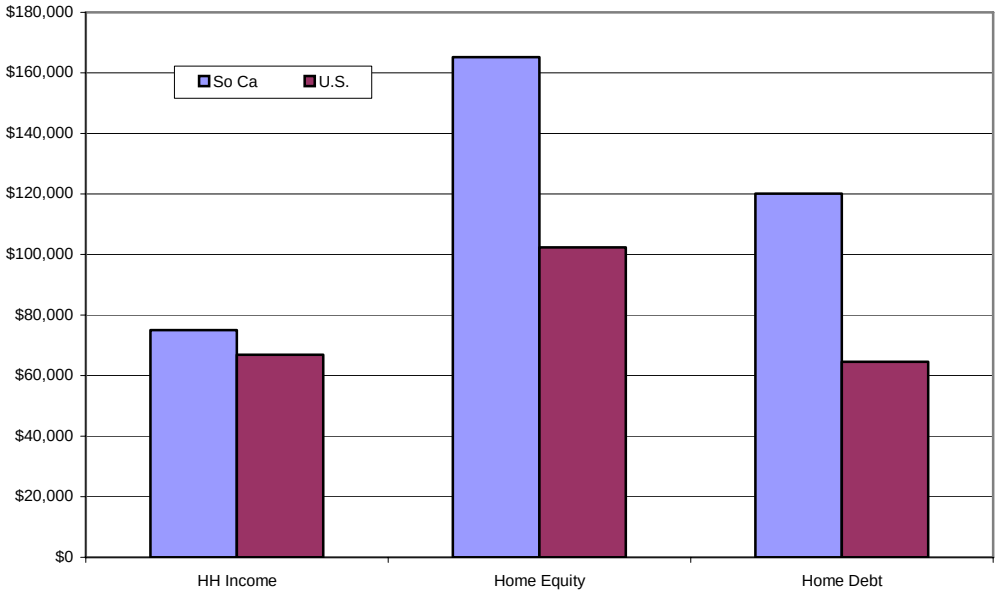
Data from the Office of Federal Housing Enterprise Oversight indicate that home prices for Southern California have increased much more rapidly in recent years than for the nation. Changes in the index in the late 1990s for this region lagged slightly behind that for the nation, but the index climbed much more rapidly in Southern California than for the nation from about 2000 to 2004. For the five-year period (from the fourth quarter of 1999 to the fourth quarter of 2004), housing prices in this region more than doubled, increasing twice as fast as prices nationally.

Despite low interest rates for mortgages, the rapid escalation in housing prices has made homes less affordable over time. The Affordability Index indicates the percent of households that could afford the median-priced home. While the national affordability index has remained relatively stable, the index has declined dramatically for all four metropolitan areas that make up Southern California. By March 2005, the affordability indices for this region ranged from 11 to 17.

Despite escalating prices and declining affordability, DataQuick reports that total housing sales in Southern California remain at near record levels (DataQuick, 2005). For those who already own a home, purchasing is possible because higher prices translate into more equity. Data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation show that in 2001/02 Southern Californian homeowners had only slightly more income - but considerably more equity in their homes – than did all homeowners in the United States (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Average Income, Equity & Debt, 2001/02

Source: Survey of Income and Program Participation



The downside is that Southern Californians were carrying more debt. With the more recent increases in home value, the equity held by owners in this region has also

grown more rapidly than for owners in the nation. For first time buyers, many have to take on what Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan calls risky adjustable-rate and interest-only mortgages to purchase a house (Haddad, 2005). The current pattern of housing finance is potentially problematic. When interest rates increase, then housing prices might decrease, thus driving down home equity. At the same time mortgage payments will increase for those with adjustable-rate loans.

The 2005 Southern California Public Opinion Survey examines the problem of housing affordability by asking, "Have you actively looked for housing elsewhere, but could not afford it?" Overall, nearly two-fifths of the respondents answered "yes." The results from this question are not the same as for the estimates based on the estimated affordability index reported earlier. The answers to the survey questions capture a broader range of affordability problems, in both the real estate and rental sectors. Those in the group answering affirmatively include persons who were able to purchase a home but nonetheless had problems finding an affordable home. At the same time, the responses underestimate the problem because the group does not include those who were discouraged by high prices and did not actively look for housing.

Nearly half of recent movers had difficulty finding affordable housing, that is, they were able to find housing despite high prices and rents. What is interesting is that over a quarter of those who did not move over the last five years also stated "yes," indicating that they actively looked or still are looking for new housing but have been unsuccessful. For many in this group, the lack of affordable housing is locking them into their current homes. Homeowners were more likely to encounter difficulties than renters, which is not surprising given the earlier discussion on the relative cost of homes versus rental units.

Housing Concerns and Responses

It is not surprising that a majority of residents do not believe their local officials are doing enough to solve the housing problem. The survey asked respondents to evaluate whether the performance of Southern California's elected officials has been generally inadequate, mixed, or generally adequate in providing affordable housing in the region. Over three-fifths stated "inadequate," while only one-seventh stated "adequate." The rest either had no opinion or gave their officials a mixed review. Recent movers and owners are more likely than their counterparts to say that the performance is inadequate. Interestingly, those in the middle income and age categories are more likely to give this response, indicating that the problem is felt most severely among the more established middle class.

Solving the lack of affordable housing is not an easy task because the problem is caused by multiple factors and is deeply rooted in the region's urban structure. In its simplest form, the low home ownership rate is the product of limited supply and demand. While average income in Southern California remains higher than for the nation, there is a wide and widening divide between those in the top half and bottom half of the economic ladder. The income inequality makes it difficult for many renters to have the

savings and purchasing power to become homeowners, although more liberal financing has enabled many to continue to get into the home market. These new homeowners face the greatest risk if the market collapses.

High housing prices continue to push up the hurdle to ownership. Supply has not kept up with population growth for a number of reasons, including local restrictions to development. The barriers are even more severe when it comes to building affordable units, with many cities failing to provide their fair share of low-cost housing. Finally, the region's inefficient urban configuration and inadequate transportation system have pushed up land cost, which in turn has pushed up the cost of housing. Given the complex forces creating the affordable housing problem, we should not expect a simple panacea with overnight results. Tackling the problem will require long-term solutions built on the coordinated efforts of many governmental bodies working on both the immediate and fundamental causes.

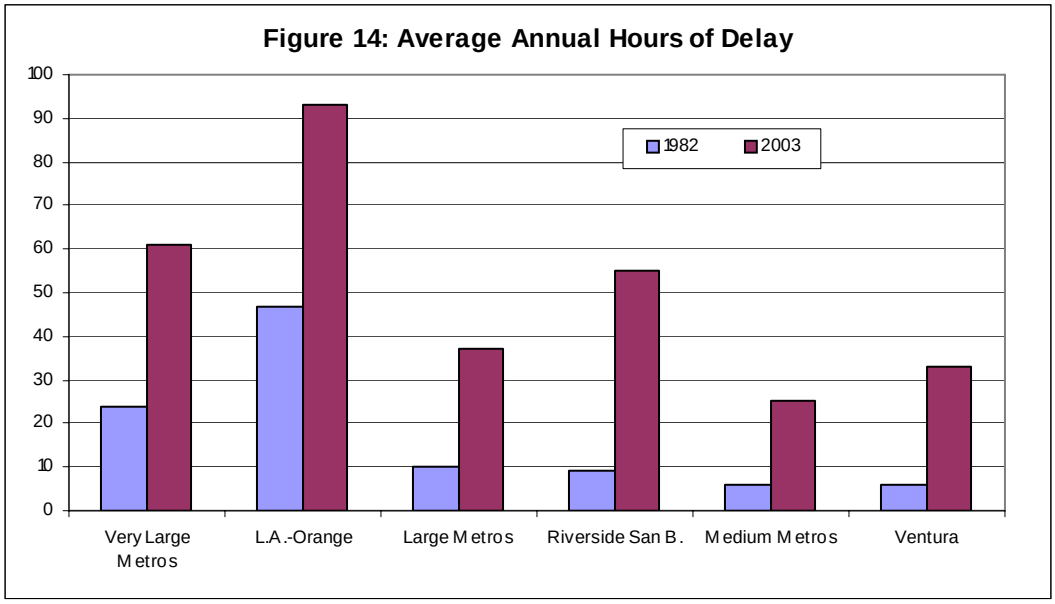
Congestion in Southern California

Despite the popular image of the Southern California commute as the prototypical nightmare trip to work, workers in this region spend less time commuting to their jobs than do workers in other large urban areas. According to the most recently available statistics from the 2003 American Community Survey, the counties that comprise Southern California are not among the ones with the highest average commute times. Out of 223 counties, Los Angeles ranked 39th, and Orange ranked 88th. Riverside ranked the highest at 18th, while San Bernardino came in at 49th and Ventura at 101st.

Most of the counties in the New York, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. metropolitan areas ranked higher than the average for this region. Moreover, the Southern California averages in 2003 are roughly comparable to those reported from the 2000 Census, indicating essentially no increase in recent years. Average commute time is lower in Southern California than in other major metropolitan areas because this region is more automobile oriented. In other regions, commute times by public transit are considerably higher than by automobile, despite the fact that transit trips tend to be shorter.

Congestion and Delays

What makes Southern California stand out is the level of congestion. Nationally, there has been a noticeable increase in three measures of congestion between 1982 and 2002: the extent (percent of trips affected), intensity (average minutes of delay per vehicle), and duration (number of hours with congestion per day). (Thompson, 2004). In terms of the average hours wasted annually due to delays per traveler, the combined Los Angeles and Orange county area has the worst congestion among very large metropolitan areas, as well as all metropolitan areas (Schrank and Lomax, 2004). The Riverside and San Bernardino area ranks second out of 27 large metropolitan areas, and Ventura tied for seventh out of 30 medium metropolitan areas (see Figure 14). These delays, rather than just the number of minutes commuting, is a source of frustration with travel within the region.



We looked at the proportion of the commuters affected by congestion based on two questions. The first asked whether traffic congestion was a problem on their last reported trip, with slight modifications in wording for work trips and for other types of trips. Over two-fifths of those responding to this question encountered congestion. Congestion was more likely for those commuting to work, due in large part because they are more likely to travel during peak traffic periods.

The second question asked respondents to choose one of the following to best describe traffic congestion in general: 1) frequently a problem but it is predictable, 2) frequently a problem and it is not predictable, or 3) not a problem. Over four-fifths of the respondents are in the first two categories; that is, they frequently experience congestion. Interestingly, the rate is higher for those whose last trip was not a work commute.

This result may be due to differences in subjective standards, but also due to the fact that the last trip is an imprecise proxy for the range of trips taken by the respondent. For most respondents, the pattern of congestion is fairly predictable. Although the question does not define what is meant by frequent, cross tabulating the responses to this question with the responses about the last trip indicates that half of those who stated "frequently" experience congestion for any given trip.

How often congestion is encountered varies systematically by economic and demographic groups. For the last trip, younger adults, minorities, and those from lower-income households are more likely to experience congestion than their respective counterparts. These differences are likely due to both variations in travel patterns and geographic locations.

Congestion Trends and Perceptions

The most widely used question to gauge perceptions about traffic is whether congestion has become worse, is the same, or is better than in the past. In 2005, a large majority (61%) of residents in this region stated that congestion is worse than a year ago. This is considerably higher than the results from a 1999 survey of Southern California, which asked separate questions for freeway traffic and street traffic (SCAG, 2000). However, the current opinion in this region is consistent with results from a 2001 national survey of voters and a 2005 survey of residents of the Washington, D.C. area (NAR, 2002; *Washington Post*, 2005). The percent stating "worse" in Washington DC (73% of those with a valid response) is higher, but this may be due to asking if traffic has changed over the last five years. Finally, it is worth noting that frustration with congestion is an international phenomenon. Over half of those in the United Kingdom believe that "roads had got worse over the last two years" (United Kingdom, Office for National Statistics, 2004).

The responses to the congestion question should not be seen as objective and reliable measures of changes in the prevalence or level of congestion. For example, the difference in the Southern California responses for 1999 and 2005 is surprising given that there is little evidence that the average commute time has increased substantially during this period. Instead, the responses are probably due to both real world traffic conditions and people's declining tolerance. Over time, a similar situation can be perceived as being worse. The answers, then, indicate the extent of the frustration with congestion. At the same time, they are not completely subjective. The responses are correlated with the odds of encountering congestion. Half of those giving a "worse" response encountered congestion on their last trip, compared to only a third giving a "same" or "better" response.

Political Perceptions

Given the pervasive dissatisfaction with traffic congestion, it is not surprising that solving transportation problems has emerged as one of the top issues for local government. When municipal elected officials were asked which condition within their respective city has deteriorated the most, they ranked traffic first (Brennan and Hoene, 2004). Moreover, half stated that traffic conditions have gotten worse over the last year. Within this region, the Southern California Association of Government has identified traffic congestion as a major regional problem requiring inter-governmental coordination and cooperation.

While elected officials recognize the problem, residents appear less than satisfied with their actions. Respondents were asked whether the performance of Southern California's elected officials in improving transportation has been generally inadequate, mixed, or generally adequate. Nearly half believe that the officials have done an inadequate job, and nearly another quarter gave them a mixed review. Not surprisingly, those who encountered congestion are more likely to give a lower rating.

To be fair to those in the public sector, it should be noted that there is no quick, easy, or inexpensive solution. Traffic congestion is rooted in an automobile-oriented urban structure that was produced over decades (Cane and Ong, 2004). Congestion is also the product of what economists term a market failure because there are no immediate and direct financial disincentives to discourage travel during peak time periods. Seemingly rational individual actions have generated a less than optimal outcome for society as a whole. Fixing the congestion problem will require time, concerted effort, and resources; nonetheless, addressing this issue is high on the public's priority list.

Conclusion

As the name implies, public opinion surveys gauge public opinion, not objective reality. While traffic monitoring might tell us that traffic congestion in the region has declined, it is still important to know that the public still believes it is a serious – in fact, the most serious – problem in the region. The Southern California Survey provides useful insights into how residents feel about many aspects of life in the region, from problems to strengths, to how engaged we are in our community. It is certainly not exhaustive. There are many more topics to be covered in the future, such as globalization and the environment. The survey will be most useful as it evolves and is eventually able to monitor trends over time.

The usefulness of the survey also depends on it reaching a broad group, including elected officials, interest groups, decision makers, and the general public. An informed populace is good for democracy. We view this survey as an important contribution to regional policy discussions, providing useful information to help inform residents and decisionmakers as they make critical policy choices for the Southern California region.

Acknowledgements: *The authors would like to thank Norman Wong and Lucy Tran for their help with formatting and editing this chapter.*

Appendix: Southern California Public Opinion Survey, 2005

The 2005 Southern California Public Opinion Survey is supported by the UCLA Ralph and Goldy Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies and is designed to gather the views and opinions of Southern California residents on critical public policy issues in this region. The survey was developed with input from the campus and community organizations. UCLA units include the Center for Communications and Community, the Institute for Transportation Studies, the UCLA Center for Civil Society, and the UCLA Anderson School. Three public agencies participated in the process: the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), the Metropolitan Transportation Agency (MTA) and the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation (LAEDC). Several UCLA faculty provided valuable input: Professors Vickie Mays, Michael Stoll, Brian Taylor, Amy Zegart, Frank Gilliam, Helmut Anheier, Chris Thornberg, and Ed Leamer.

The 2005 Survey gathered basic demographic data and covered seven topical areas: 1) major issues facing the region, 2) the efficacy of local government, 3) transportation, 4) the state of the regional economy, 5) housing, 6) civic engagement, and 7) major disasters. When possible, questions were worded to parallel existing questions from other surveys.

The Survey was conducted in English and Spanish during the months of January and February 2005 using random digit dialing, and the data were collected by The Social Science Research Center at California State University, Fullerton. There are 1544 completed surveys for the five counties: Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura. The sample is divided proportionally by county household population. The characteristics of the sample by age, ethnicity, income, and home ownership categories are consistent with the 2004 March Current Population Survey. There is a sampling error of +/- 2.6 percent at the 95 percent confidence level for the full sample and +/- 3.7 percent for subsamples. (Sampling error may be larger for subpopulations).

The General Social Survey is conducted by the National Opinion Research Center, which has asked the generalized trust question 25 times since 1972. Tabulations in this chapter are made through the Computer-assisted Survey Methods Program (CSM) at the University of California, Berkeley.

The 2000 Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey is conducted by the Saguaro Seminar at Harvard University, with Professor Robert D. Putnam as the principal investigator. The tabulations in this chapter are made from the data set archived as study USMISC2000-SOCCAP by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research.

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See also, http://lewis.spa.ucla.edu/special/SocalSurvey/index.cfm for SCS Fact Sheets and Related Publications.

Endnotes

[1] Our question on contacting an elected official specifically included email and phone contact, while the question PPIC cited did not. PPIC's question on meetings also specified local or school affairs, while ours only asked about "neighborhood-wide" meetings or events.

[2] "Other" includes Asians, African-Americans, and mixed ethnicities, as well as respondents who did not indicate their ethnicity on the survey.

[3] Extensive descriptions of the criteria for designation as a landslide or liquefaction zone can be found in the CGS's Special Publications 117 and 118. More information on earthquake hazards and their mapping, including the disclosure requirement for home buyers, can be found at http://gmw.consrv.ca.gov/shmp/index.htm.

[4] It should be noted that hazard data exists mostly in and around relatively well-populated areas so these percentages should be viewed as low bounds with respect to the whole counties. For example, data does not exist for much of the desert and very mountainous regions of Los Angeles County.