

# USC Price-USC Schwarzenegger Institute Poll on Homelessness

The USC Price-Schwarzenegger poll on homelessness was fielded by YouGov from February 1-5, 2020 in English and Spanish and is a representative sample of 1,000 likely voters in California (Democrats, Republicans, and no party preference/other). Questions were designed by USC Price faculty research experts. The poll was fielded by YouGov, a global public opinion and data company based in London. YouGov interviewed 1,000 likely California voters (Democrats, Republicans, and no-party-preference/other). Interviews were administered online via a panel recruited by YouGov, which used sampling and post-stratification weights so that the 1,000 person sample was representative of the likely California voter population. The survey was directed by Dr. Christian Grose, Dr. Gary Painter, Dr. Mindy Romero and Dr. Pamela Clouser McCann of the USC Price School of Public Policy. Margin of error is +/-3.3.

## Key Findings

1. California voters named homelessness or housing as the number one issue facing the state (22.9% of Californians), followed by climate change/environment (14.8%), immigration (9.2%), and “Trump” (7.5%).
2. A shockingly high 37.5% of California voters are afraid they or someone in their family could become homeless. This is even when almost half the state rated the economy as excellent or good (44%). No public opinion poll has ever asked this question in California until the Schwarzenegger-Price California Issues poll.
3. This fear of becoming homeless is quite high among Latino California voters. 47% of Latino voters in California are afraid they or a family member could become homeless, and 33% of non-Hispanic white voters are afraid they or a family member may become homeless.
4. More than one quarter (27.3%) of California voters know someone personally who is homeless. This is surprisingly high.
5. When asked about specific policies, California voters have a mix of attitudes stressing both compassion and enforcement/restrictions. Policies that are popular combine a mix of compassion and enforcement. For instance, a majority of Californians support:
  - Creating more RV parking for homeless people in public areas (56% support more RV parking)
  - Allowing families with children to stay on the street unhoused if no other options (50% support)
  - Restricting sleeping in public tent encampments (64% support restrictions)
  - Restricting people sleeping unhoused in high-fire areas like canyons and hills (75% support restrictions)
  - Providing interim housing and simultaneously removing people off the streets (65% support)
6. Policies that are enforcement-only are unpopular. For example, only 28% of California voters favor an “enforcement first” policy to “enforce removal of homeless encampments on the street before establishing more interim housing shelters for homeless people.”
7. We also examined public support for several policy statements from mayors who are guest speakers at Thursday’s summit. We did not use their names and only asked about their policies. California voters support the homelessness policies of Mayor Kevin Faulconer of San Diego (54% support a combined compassion/enforcement policy of not leaving people to die on streets); Mayor Robert Garcia of Long Beach (74% support more inclusionary zoning practices and building more homes for the middle class); and Mayor Darrell Steinberg of Sacramento (65% support his “right to shelter” proposal to quickly build interim housing and then move people off streets).

Results from homelessness policy questions are displayed below. Demographic, party identification and other question data are also available, but are not displayed below.

**Q. In one or two words, what is the most important issue facing California right now? [open ended response]**

22.9% Homelessness or housing  
14.8% Climate change/environment  
9.2% Immigration  
7.5% Trump  
4.4% Health care  
4.1% Taxes  
2.7% Economy/budget/spending  
2.6% Income inequality  
2.1% Democrats/liberals  
1.9% Cost of living  
1.0% Newsom  
1.0% Gun control  
25.8% of respondents named an issue brought up by <1% of other voters; or named more than one issue.

**Q. How would you rate economic conditions in California today – as excellent, good, fair or poor?**

6.8% Excellent  
36.7% Good  
35.9% Fair  
20.3% Poor

**Q. Which of the following best describes your primary place of residence?**

49.1% I own a home or condominium.  
35.0% I rent a home or apartment.  
11.2% I live with others and do not pay rent or a mortgage.  
4.8% Other/I live in a vehicle.

**Q. Homelessness is when a person or family sleeps in a place overnight somewhere not designed or typically used for sleep, such as in a park, an abandoned building, a tent, a car, or a bus or train station. Are you afraid that you or someone in your family could become homeless?**

37.5% Afraid  
19.8% Neither afraid nor unafraid  
42.6% Not afraid

**Q. Do you personally know anyone who is homeless?**

27.3% Yes  
72.7% No

**Q. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?  
The streets and public areas near where I live have many tent encampments.**

41.5% Agree  
58.5% Disagree

**Below are a list of statements. I would like you to read each one and tell us if you think the statement is true or false. It is ok if you are not sure. Please make your best guess. [Note: order of next three questions was randomized to respondents]**

**Q. Most homeless people are on the streets for economic reasons. They lost a job or could no longer afford to rent or stay in a home.**

72.3% I think the statement is true.  
27.7% I think the statement is false.

**Q. Most homeless people on the streets have mental or other health problems.**

75.0% I think the statement is true.  
25.0% I think the statement is false.

**Q. Most homeless people currently have access to public shelters in California.**

38.0% I think the statement is true.  
62.0% I think the statement is false.

**Q. Who do you think has done the least to solve California's homelessness crisis?**

24.2% California's Governor  
36.4% The California State Legislature  
37.4% Local elected officials such as city mayors

**Q. Which one of the following do you think is the most likely reason for the rise in the number of people who are homeless in California?**

56.5% They cannot afford to find a place to rent.  
17.5% They are mentally ill.  
12.8% They refuse to live in shelters.  
9.1% They would rather live in California than somewhere else more affordable.  
4.0% They recently lost a job.

**Q. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Most homeless people are employed or want to be employed.**

43.0% Agree  
24.9% Neither agree nor disagree  
32.1% Disagree

**Q. What actions are you willing to take to address California's homeless problem? [Respondents were able to choose more than one action from a list of choices.]**

69.9% of respondents said they would take one or more actions on homelessness.<sup>1</sup>  
30.1% said they cannot take any actions at this time.

**[Note: The next 11 questions are displayed in order from most popular to least popular policy proposal, but were presented in random order to survey respondents to avoid question fatigue.]**

**Q. The state of California should audit spending on homelessness to ensure the funds are being spent appropriately and effectively.**

**Do you support or oppose this policy idea?**

87.5% Support  
9.9% Neither support nor oppose  
2.6% Oppose

<sup>1</sup> Among the answer responses available, respondents could choose one or more actions. The results on each of these actions are as follows: 42.0% would "donate to nonprofit organizations that address homelessness" and 58.0% would not; 31.2% would "write a short letter or email to your state legislators urging action on homelessness"; and 68.8% would not; 23.9% would "volunteer at a homeless shelter or other nonprofit organization who works with people experiencing homelessness" and 76.1% would not; 6.8% would "create a granny flat or rent a room to someone who is currently homeless" and 93.2% would not; and 22.5% said they would take "some other action" with 77.5% not choosing this option.

**Q. We must not turn away from our failure as a society to care for those who are suffering, are mentally ill, and need our support and a home. We must aggressively build both affordable housing and homes for working and middle-class families. But it's still not enough, and California must also consider new inclusionary zoning policies to create more affordable housing.**

**Do you support or oppose this policy idea?**

75.1% Support  
10.5% Neither support nor oppose  
14.5% Oppose

**Q. California should restrict people from sleeping unhoused in high-fire risk areas like canyons and hills.**

**Do you support or oppose this policy idea?**

74.8% Support  
16.7% Neither support nor oppose  
8.5% Oppose

**Q. A “right to shelter” policy will work to quickly establish more interim housing arrangements, also known as housing shelters, for homeless people before enforcing removal of homeless encampments on streets.**

**Do you support or oppose this policy idea?**

73.4% Support  
15.2% Neither support nor oppose  
11.4% Oppose

**Q. A housing and enforcement policy promises to establish more interim housing shelters quickly for homeless people while simultaneously enforcing removal of homeless encampments on the streets.**

**Do you support or oppose this policy idea?**

65.7% Support  
20.7% Neither support nor oppose  
13.6% Oppose

**Q. California should restrict sleeping and tent encampments on sidewalks, in public parks, and in other public areas.**

**Do you support or oppose this policy idea?**

63.5% Support  
16.4% Neither support nor oppose  
20.1% Oppose

**Q. California, as a state, needs to decide that it's not acceptable to condone living outdoors in urban areas. It's not compassionate to enable the brutal life found in tent cities. Sometimes you have to force people to make a change.**

**Do you support or oppose this policy idea?**

56.4% Support  
20.4% Neither support nor oppose  
23.2% Oppose

**Q. More RV parking for homeless people should be provided in designated public areas throughout the state, including on public streets, public parking lots and public parks.**

**Do you support or oppose this policy idea?**

56.1% Support  
14.2% Neither support nor oppose  
29.8% Oppose

**Q. California must increase the tax credits available to those who rent in closer proportion to the tax credits received by those who own their residences.**

**Do you support or oppose this policy idea?**

55.3% Support  
22.0% Neither support nor oppose  
22.7% Oppose

**Q. Families with children who are homeless should not be forced off the streets and out of public areas if they cannot find a home.**

**Do you support or oppose this policy idea?**

53.7% Support  
24.4% Neither support nor oppose  
21.9% Oppose

**Q. An enforcement first policy promises to enforce removal of homeless encampments on the street before establishing more interim housing shelters for homeless people.**

**Do you support or oppose this policy idea?**

27.5% Support  
15.4% Neither support nor oppose  
57.1% Oppose

## USC Price-Schwarzenegger Institute Poll on Homelessness Team

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Christian Grose is Academic Director of the USC Schwarzenegger Institute for State and Global Policy and Associate Professor of Public Policy at the University of Southern California. He served as the Director of the Political Science and International Relations Ph.D. program from 2015-18.

He is the author of more than 30 articles and chapters about American politics, public policy; and political representation; including in the *American Journal of Political Science* and the *Journal of Politics*. His book *Congress in Black and White* (Cambridge University Press) won the best book on race and politics award from the American Political Science Association. His research has been funded by the Russell Sage Foundation, the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation, and the MIT Election Data Science Center. Grose directs USC's Fair Maps and Political Reform Lab, where researchers, students, and policy practitioners work together to generate new ideas

to reform American democracy. He is also an expert in political reforms and voting rights in California, including the top-two primary and the independent redistricting commission.

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Gary Painter is a Professor in the Sol Price School of Public Policy at the University of Southern California. He also serves as the Director of the Sol Price Center for Social Innovation and the Homelessness Policy Research Institute. He recently published a co-authored book entitled, "Payment by Results and Social Impact Bonds: Outcome-based Payment Systems in the UK and US." He has published numerous articles in top journals such as the *Review of Economics and Statistics*, *Journal of Urban Economics*, *Urban Studies*, *Journal of Human Resources*, *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *Real Estate Economics*, *Journal of Real Estate Finance and Economics*, and *Regional Science and Urban Economics*.

Professor Painter is a leading figure in the field of social innovation. In addition to his recent book, he works extensively with a variety of social innovation organizations and collective impact networks to address some of the grand challenges that society faces. His current research focuses on how to activate the social innovation process. Professor Painter also has extensive expertise in housing, urban economics, and education policy, which shapes his research on how the social innovation process can identify new models of social change within these complex policy areas.

He has served as a consultant for the National Association of Realtors, Pacific Economics Group, Andrew Davidson Co., Fannie Mae, Grant Thornton LLP, Burr Consulting, and the Research Institute for Housing America.

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Mindy Romero is a Research Assistant Professor and the founder and director of the California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP) at the University of Southern California's Sol Price School of Public Policy in Sacramento. Romero is a political sociologist and holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of California, Davis. Her research focuses on political behavior and race/ethnicity, and seeks to explain patterns of voting and political underrepresentation, particularly among youth and communities of color in California and the U.S.

Romero has been invited to speak about civic engagement and political rights in numerous venues, testifying before the National Commission on Voting Rights and the California Legislature, among others. Her research has been cited in major news outlets, including *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Sacramento Bee*, *Politico* and the *Huffington Post*. She has also been a frequent guest on National Public Radio, Capital Public Radio, and several other NPR-affiliated stations in California. She is a regular op-ed contributor to the *Sacramento Bee*.

Romero works with a wide array of policymakers, elected officials, voter education groups and community advocates to strengthen political participation and representation. She is currently a member of the Public Policy Institute Statewide Survey Advisory Committee, President of the Board of California Common Cause, and former Vice-Chair of the Social Services Commission for the City of Davis.

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Pamela McCann, Ph.D., is an associate professor at the USC Sol Price School of Public Policy. Dr. McCann previously served as an assistant professor of public affairs at the University of Washington.

Her research interests include U.S. political institutions, bureaucratic delegation, federalism, intergovernmental politics, legislative behavior, public policy, health policy, policy diffusion, state and local politics. She examines the influence of the states and state-level political institutions on national political maneuvering and policy choices. In particular, Dr. McCann focuses on the influence of policy actors' intergovernmental context on legislative choices. Her recent work addresses the impact of the interaction of state and national political institutions on political choices and policy outcomes.

Dr. McCann received her Ph.D. from the University of Michigan, where she received the Gerald R. Ford Fellowship (2010-2011) and the Rackham Pre-Doctoral Fellowship (2009-2010). She also earned the Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award (2008-2009; 2004-2005), and named National Science Foundation IDEAS IGERT fellow (2006-2008).