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## IGS Poll

### Title

#2019-05: Three in four Californians support setting limits on housing in high risk wildfire areas of the state, but voters are divided when it comes to other housing development policies.

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***Three in four Californians support setting limits on housing in high risk wildfire areas of the state, but voters are divided when it comes to other housing development policies.***

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The latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* finds a lack of consensus among Californians on a number of policy proposals relating to housing. But one issue that voters do agree on, at least in concept, is that limits should be imposed on new housing development in high-risk wildfire areas. Three in four voters statewide (74%) support this policy, while just 25% are opposed.

When presented with three public policy actions aimed at making housing more affordable, voters are divided as to which would be most effective. The largest proportion (34%) chooses offering additional tax breaks and subsidies to lower and middle-income homebuyers as the preferred course of action. This compares to 24% who think building more multi-unit housing in urban areas and along public transit corridors would be the best method to make housing more affordable, while 17% select increasing the share of rental units under rent control in this setting. Nearly a quarter of voters (24%), including large proportions of Republicans and conservatives, reject all three approaches.

A similar lack of consensus is observed when voters are asked whether state government should assume a bigger role in guiding housing development decisions. About half (51%) feel that the affordable housing situation in California is now so serious that state government should step in and require local communities to build more housing in their areas or be penalized. However, 47% disagree and feel these decisions should remain under local control.

These findings come from the latest statewide *Berkeley IGS Poll* completed online in English and Spanish among 4,435 registered voters June 4-10.

## **Strong backing for imposing limits on new housing development in high risk wildfire areas, at least in concept**

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Large majorities of voters agree that because of the growing threat of wildfires in the state limits should be imposed on new housing development in high-risk wildfire areas. Three in four voters statewide (74%) support this proposal, while just one in four (25%) are opposed. Support is bipartisan and includes large majorities of voters across all major regions of the state.

While voters broadly support the concept of limiting housing growth in high risk areas, they are doing so without reference to the specific areas of the state that could be affected by such limits. A recent report from the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection estimates that as many as one in four Californians currently live in areas that could be considered to be at high risk for wildfires. This not only includes rural and less populated regions of the state, but also a number of communities in suburban Southern California and the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area.

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**Table 1**  
**Due to the growing threat of wildfires in California, should limits be imposed on new housing development in high-risk wildfire areas (among California registered voters)**

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	Support %	Oppose %
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Party registration</b>		
Democrat	84	16
Republican	57	43
No Party Preference/other	75	25
<b>Political ideology</b>		
Very conservative	51	48
Somewhat conservative	63	37
Moderate	75	25
Somewhat liberal	82	18
Very liberal	88	12
<b>Region</b>		
Los Angeles County	79	21
Orange/San Diego counties	74	26
Other Southern California	75	24
Central Valley	67	33
San Francisco Bay Area	77	23
Other Northern California	66	34

*Note: Differences between the sum of each item's percentages and 100% equal proportion of voters with no opinion.*

### **Divided views about best policy for the state to make housing more affordable**

The survey presented voters with three different policies that state government could take in an attempt to making housing more affordable, and asked which they felt would be most effective. The proposals included offering additional tax breaks and subsidies to lower and middle-income homebuyers, increasing the share of rental units under rent control, and allowing more multi-unit apartments and condominiums to be built in urban areas and along public transit corridors.

None of the three achieves majority backing in this setting. The largest proportion (34%) thinks offering additional tax breaks and subsidies to lower and middle-income homebuyers would do the most to make housing more affordable. One in four (24%) feel building more multi-unit housing along public transit corridors and in urban areas would be most effective, while 17% choose increasing the share of rental units under rent control as the best strategy. Nearly a quarter (24%), mainly Republicans and conservatives, reject all three approaches.

Offering subsidies to low and middle-income homebuyers has proportionately greater appeal to political moderates, voters with annual household incomes of less than \$60,000, and those with fewer years of formal education. By contrast, voters in the San Francisco Bay Area, and those with higher levels of education or income are more likely to feel building more multi-unit housing in urban areas or along public transit corridors would be a better approach.

**Table 2**  
**Which of the following three policy approaches would be the best way**  
**to make housing more affordable in California?**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<b>Offer additional subsidies to low/mid income homebuyers</b>	<b>Build more multi-unit housing along public transit corridors and in urban areas</b>	<b>Increase the share of rental units under rent control</b>	<b>None of these</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Party registration</b>				
Democrats	38	25	23	14
Republicans	29	20	7	44
No party preference/other	34	25	16	24
<b>Political ideology</b>				
Very conservative	23	16	8	53
Somewhat conservative	32	19	10	39
Moderate	41	23	12	24
Somewhat liberal	34	30	23	13
Very liberal	30	28	31	10
<b>Region</b>				
Los Angeles County	36	22	23	19
Orange/San Diego counties	31	25	17	27
Other Southern California	42	16	13	28
Central Valley	38	22	12	28
San Francisco Bay Area	26	33	17	23
Other Northern California	35	27	12	26
<b>Tenure</b>				
Homeowner	34	26	12	28
Renter/other	35	22	22	21
<b>Annual household income</b>				
Less than \$60,000	40	19	20	21
\$60,000-\$99,999	35	19	19	27
\$100,000 or more	28	33	12	26
<b>Education</b>				
High school graduate or less	40	17	15	28
Some college/trade school	36	18	18	27
College graduate	30	31	18	21
Post graduate work	28	37	18	17

*Note: Differences between the sum of each item's percentages and 100% equal proportion of voters with no opinion.*

## **Voters also divided about whether that the state should assume a bigger role in guiding housing development in local communities**

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A similar lack of consensus emerges when voters are asked whether the state should assume a bigger role in guiding housing development decisions in local areas. Statewide, 51% of voters believe the affordable housing situation is now so serious that state government should assume a bigger role and require local governments to build more housing in their areas or be penalized. However, 47% disagree and feel decisions about housing should remain under local control.

There are large partisan and ideological differences about this. More than two in three registered Democrats and political liberals support the state taking on a bigger role in housing development. This contrasts sharply with the views of Republicans and conservatives, large majorities of whom believe development decisions should remain in local hands.

There are also sizable differences in views about the role of state government in housing decisions by region and across demographic subgroups of the registered voter population. For example, majorities of voters in Los Angeles County, the San Francisco Bay Area, those under age 40, renters, and ethnic voters support the state assuming a larger role in local housing decisions. On the other hand, majorities in Southern California outside Los Angeles County, voters age 50 or older, homeowners, and white non-Hispanics favor keeping these decisions in the hands of local officials.

**Table 3**  
**Should state government assume a bigger role and require local communities to build more housing in their areas or should these decisions remain in local hands? (among California registered voters)**

	<b>State should assume bigger role in local housing decisions %</b>	<b>Housing decisions should remain in local hands %</b>
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Party registration</b>		
Democrat	69	29
Republican	23	76
No Party Preference/other	49	50
<b>Political ideology</b>		
Very conservative	20	78
Somewhat conservative	24	75
Moderate	50	48
Somewhat liberal	67	32
Very liberal	78	21
<b>Region</b>		
Los Angeles County	58	40
Orange/San Diego counties	47	52
Other Southern California	41	57
Central Valley	47	51
San Francisco Bay Area	56	42
Other Northern California	51	48
<b>Homeowner</b>		
Yes	42	56
No	59	40
<b>Age</b>		
18-29	67	33
30-39	56	43
40-49	51	48
50-64	44	54
65 or older	45	53
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>		
White non-Hispanic	45	54
Latino	60	39
Asian American	65	33
African American	61	38

*Note: Differences between the sum of each item's percentages and 100% equal proportion of voters with no opinion.*

## **Questions Asked**

Which of the following do you feel would be the best way for California to make housing more affordable: (1) increase the share of rental units with rent control, (2) offer additional tax breaks or subsidies to lower and middle income homebuyers, (3) allow more multi-unit apartments and condominiums to be built in urban areas or along public transit corridors, or (4) none of these?

Which of the following two statements about housing do you agree with more: (1) the lack of affordable housing is now so serious that state government should assume a bigger role and require local communities to build more housing in their areas or be penalized or (2) decisions about building more housing should remain in the hands of local officials?

Due to the growing threat of wildfires in California, do you support or oppose the state imposing limits on new housing development in high-risk wildfire areas?

## **About the Survey**

The findings in this report are based on a *Berkeley IGS Poll* completed by the Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) at the University of California, Berkeley. The poll was administered online in English and Spanish June 4-10, 2019 among 4,435 registered voters statewide.

The survey was administered by distributing email invitations to stratified random samples of the state's registered voters. Once the questionnaire and email invitations had been finalized, they were translated into the Spanish and reviewed for cultural appropriateness. Each email invited voters to participate in a non-partisan survey conducted by IGS and provided a link to the IGS website where the survey was housed. Reminder emails were distributed to non-responding voters over a seven-day period. An opt out link was provided at the bottom of each invitation for voters not wishing to participate or not wanting to receive future emails from IGS about the survey.

Samples of registered voters with email addresses were provided to IGS by Political Data, Inc., a leading supplier of registered voter lists in California. The email addresses of voters were derived from information contained on the state's official voter registration rolls. The overall sample of registered voters with email addresses was stratified in an attempt to obtain a proper balance of survey respondents across major segments of the registered voter population by age, gender and race/ethnicity.

To protect the anonymity of survey respondents, voters' email addresses and all other personally identifiable information were purged from the data file and replaced with a unique and anonymous identification number during data processing. At the conclusion of the data processing phase, post-stratification weights were applied to align the sample to population characteristics of the state's overall registered voter population.



The amount of sampling error associated with the results from the survey is difficult to calculate precisely due to the effects of sample stratification and the post-stratification weighting. Nevertheless, it is likely that the results from the overall registered voter sample are subject to a sampling error of approximately +/- 2.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Results based on subgroups of this population would be subject to larger margins of sampling error.

Detailed tabulations reporting the results to each question included in this report can be found at the *Berkeley IGS Poll* website at <https://igs.berkeley.edu/igs-poll/berkeley-igs-poll>.

#### **About the Institute of Governmental Studies**

The Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) is an interdisciplinary organized research unit that pursues a vigorous program of research, education, publication and public service. A component of the University of California (UC) system's flagship Berkeley campus, it is the oldest organized research unit in the UC system and the oldest public policy research center in the state. The director of the Institute of Governmental Studies is Lisa Garcia Bedolla.

IGS conducts periodic surveys of public opinion in California on matters of politics and public policy through its *Berkeley IGS Poll*. The poll, which is disseminated widely, seeks to provide a broad measure of contemporary public opinion, and to generate data for subsequent scholarly analysis. The director of the *Berkeley IGS Poll* is Mark DiCamillo. For a complete listing of stories issued by the *Berkeley IGS Poll* go to <https://igs.berkeley.edu/igs-poll/berkeley-igs-poll>.