

# **UCLA**

## **Southern California Survey**

### **Title**

Issue 14: Transportation, Economy, and Crime Top Los Angeles County Residents' Concerns About the Region

### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/96k7w1np>

### **Authors**

Haselhoff, Kim  
Ong, Paul M.  
Tran, Lucy

### **Publication Date**

2005-06-01

# SCS FACT SHEET

FINDINGS FROM THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY (SCS)

Vol. 1 No. 14

<http://lewis.spa.ucla.edu>

June 2005

## Transportation, Economy, and Crime Top LA County Residents' Concerns About the Region

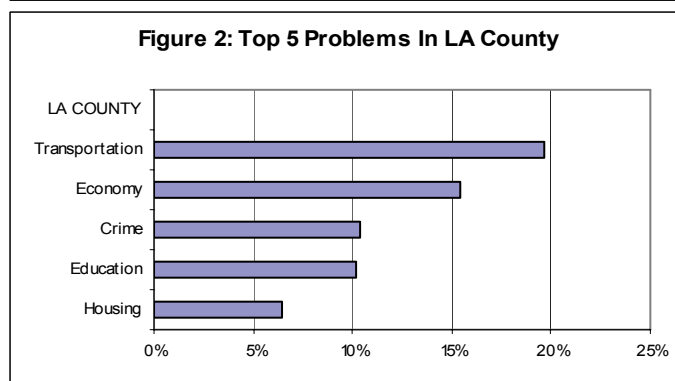
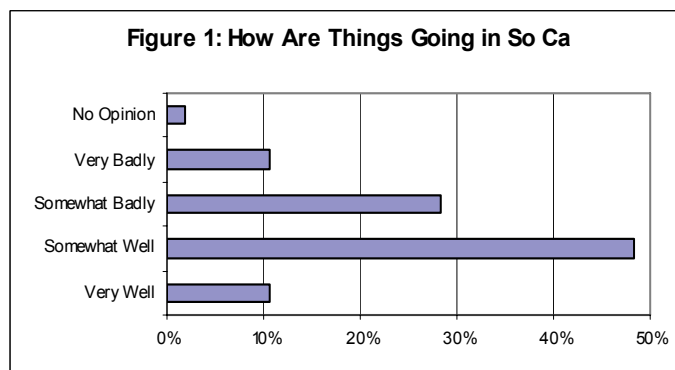
### INTRODUCTION

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 Fact Sheet presents findings from a recently completed survey of Southern California residents (those living in the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura). Details of the survey can be found in the appendix. The information from the survey can help better inform elected officials about the public's concerns and priorities, such as which problems the public finds most important. In 2005 Los Angeles County residents indicated that transportation, the economy, education, crime, and housing were the most important problems in the region. Transportation was by the far the most cited concern, both overall and across different areas of the county.

### OVERVIEW OF MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEMS

Southern California is in many ways an attractive place to live. Almost two-thirds of survey respondents in Los Angeles County believe the weather is the best thing about the region, but others also mentioned amenities (both natural and cultural) and services (8%), opportunities, including educational and economic opportunities, among others (9%), and lifestyle (6%). Many LA County residents (almost two-thirds) also believe that things are going well in the region as far as the quality of life is concerned (see Figure 1). Despite these positives, however, residents do have some serious concerns.

Figure 2 displays the top five problems in Southern California according to Los Angeles County residents. Transportation is the top concern among county residents, cited by twenty percent of respondents. Economic concerns are the second most important problem (fifteen percent), followed by crime and education (ten percent),



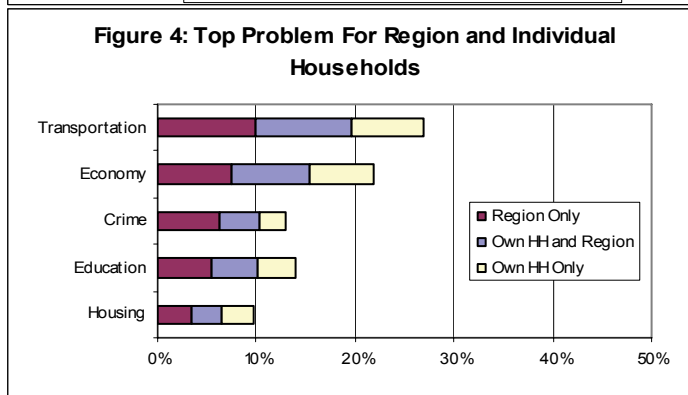
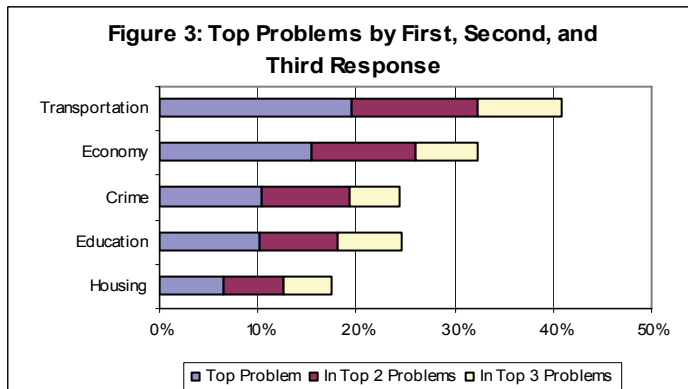
and finally, housing (seven percent). These problems are all related to life in a large metropolitan area, so it is not surprising that in comparison to the top problems in the Bay Area, we find that both regions generally share the same concerns. Transportation is the top concern in both regions, followed by economic concerns. The economy does appear to be more of a concern in the Bay Area, which is still suffering from the effects of the dot com bust. Housing also is more of a problem in the Bay Area than in Los Angeles, while education and crime are larger concerns in Los Angeles County.

To identify the most pressing problems in the region the Southern California Survey specifically asked respondents to name the three most important problems facing

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Kim Haselhoff** is a post-doctoral fellow at the Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies. **Paul Ong** is Director of the Ralph and Goldy Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies. **Lucy Tran** is an undergraduate student in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and a document assistant at the Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies.

the region. Figure 3 displays the top five problems according to all three responses, while Figure 4 displays whether respondents indicated it was an individual concern as well as a regional problem. The ranking is exactly the same.



## BACKGROUND ON SO CAL'S TOP FIVE PROBLEMS

The most overwhelming concern among Los Angeles County residents 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 Los Angeles does not have the highest average commute times in the U.S., it does stand out for its 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. These delays are a major source of frustration in the region (Ong & Haselhoff, 2005).

The economy is the second most important problem in the county. Within this category employment is a big concern. Over the last few years, the county economy has been in a doldrums. The unemployment rate increased in the early 2000s, from 5.4% in 2000 to 7.0% in 2003, but the increase was not as dramatic as the increase the county experienced during the early 1990s. In recent months the county unemployment rate has declined moderately. Real per capita income growth in

Los Angeles County has also been much slower in 2002 and 2003 than it had been a few years earlier.

Los Angeles County comprises many different cities and school districts so it is difficult to make generalizations about the state of education in the county. However, the city of Los Angeles and several neighboring cities are all part of one large school district. The Los Angeles Unified School District served almost two million students in 2002 – 2003. Although there have been some improvements, the district has been criticized over the years for its large size, bloated bureaucracy, school overcrowding, poor academic performance, and general mismanagement. Out of almost 700 schools in the district, roughly 180, or 25 percent, were labeled by the state as “program improvement” schools in 2004, meaning they are in need of improvement under the standards of the No Child Left Behind Act (Radcliffe, 2004). Dropout rates are also more than two and a half times as high as the state average, and test scores are well below the state average (LAUSD, 2005). The district does serve an extremely diverse population, with a significant number of socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Despite these statistics, many schools within the district are considered very good. However, the district continues to have a poor reputation in general.

Crime and housing round out the list of the top five problems. According to the California Department of Justice, crime has actually been declining since the mid-1990s. The rate of violent crime in Los Angeles County dropped by almost half between 1994 and 2003. Property crimes are up slightly since 1999, but are still well below the levels of the early-mid 1990s. Overall, the concern with crime seems to belie the statistics, but may be a result of media hype. The constant coverage of violent crime on local television news may be affecting residents' perceptions of the pervasiveness of crime.

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* recently reported that in Los Angeles County, the median price of a home as of June 2005 was \$429,000. The median income in the county

(based on joint 2003 tax returns) was \$49,701. The county ranked 20th in the state for housing prices. (Kelley & Yi, 2005).

## PERCEPTIONS OF PROBLEMS BY COUNTY REGIONS

In an effort to look at how different parts of the county rank the most important problems we, divided the county into three areas—the Coastal/San Fernando Valley area, the Northern and Eastern parts of the county, and the Urban Core in the center of the county, which includes downtown Los Angeles (see map). A breakdown of the top three problems by region indicates a high degree of consistency in the perception of problems among these areas (see Figure 5). There are slight 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.” In the Coastal/San Fernando Valley and Northern/Eastern regions, transportation and the economy still ranked first and second respectively, while the order was reversed in the Urban Core (over half of the residents in this region earn less than \$40,000 per year, compared to about 27 percent of residents in the other regions). As for the third most important problem, the Northern/Eastern regions and indicated crime, while the Coastal/San Fernando Valley indicated education.

## GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE ON THE TOP PROBLEMS

When it comes to rating government performance on these important issues, those who cited any of the top five problems as a concern were also more critical of local officials’ performance on that particular problem (see Figure 6). While overall just over 40 percent of respondents indicated that local officials’ performance in improving transportation was “generally inadequate,” that percentage jumped to 55 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 46 percent, versus 33 percent for all respondents. For education, the percentage who indicated officials’ performance in improving education was “inadequate” jumped significantly among those most concerned, from 50 percent overall, to 69 percent. Respondents were most disappointed with local officials’ performance in improving affordable housing in the re-

gion. While 63 percent responded with “generally inadequate” overall, that number jumped to 83 percent among those who cited housing as a major problem. We did not ask respondents to rate local officials’ performance on crime.

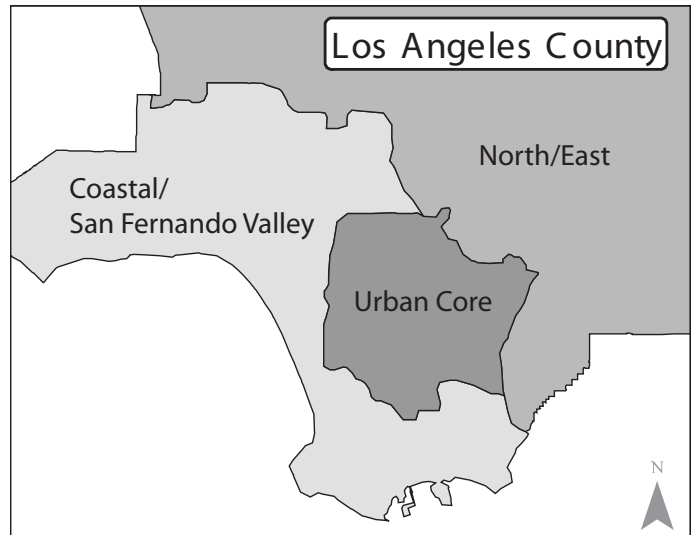
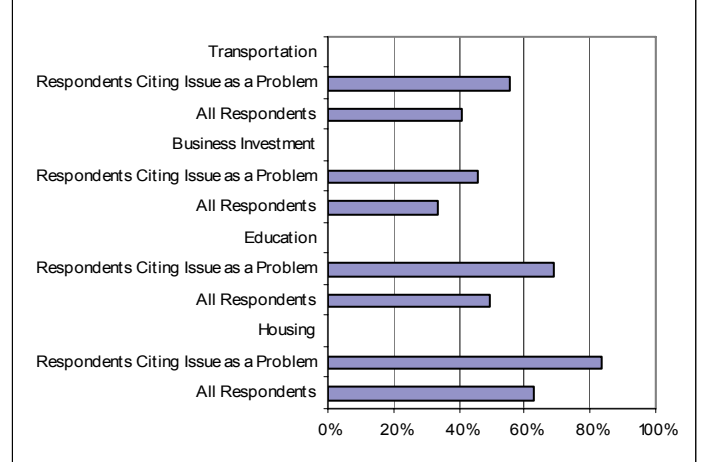


Figure 5: Most Important Problem by Region

	Most Important Problem	Second Most Important Problem	Third Most Important Problem
Coast/SF Valley	Transportation	Economy	Education
North/East	Transportation	Economy	Crime
Urban Core	Economy	Transportation	Crime

Figure 6: Elected Officials’ Performance Rated Inadequate



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank Norman Wong, Margaret Johnson, Lucy Tran, and Diana Tran for formatting and editing the Fact Sheet, and UCLA in LA for their input and suggestions.

## DISCLAIMER

Neither the University of California, the School of Public Affairs nor the Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies either support or disavow the findings in any project, report, paper, or research listed herein. University affiliations are for identification only; the University is not involved in or responsible for the project.

**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 Community Partnerships, the Institute for Transportation Studies, the Center for Civil Society, and the Anderson School of Management. 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. There are 877 completed surveys for Los Angeles county. 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 +/- 3.3 for the Los Angeles county sample. (Sampling error may be larger for subpopulations).

**REFERENCES**

California Labor Market Info. (2005). Data Library. <http://www.labormarketinfo.eed.ca.gov>. Accessed 6/14/05.

Kelley, D. & Yi, D. (2005). "Home Prices Statewide at Record Level." *Los Angeles Times*. June 13.

Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). (2005). District Accountability Report Card 2003 – 2004. <http://www.lausd.k12.ca.us>. Accessed 6/14/05.

Office of the Attorney General, State of California Department of Justice. (2005). Criminal Justice Profile Series. [http://stats.doj.ca.gov/cjsc\\_stats/prof03/index.htm](http://stats.doj.ca.gov/cjsc_stats/prof03/index.htm). Accessed 6/14/05.

Ong, P., Haselhoff, K., Zonta, M. & Thornberg, C. (2004). "The State of California's Housing." Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies.

Ong, P. & Haselhoff, K. (2005). "Perceptions of Congestion Not Universal." *SCS Fact Sheet*, Vol. 1, No. 10, UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies.

Radcliffe, J. (2004). "19 Valley Schools Fall Below Standards: 180 Troubled Campuses in LAUSD." *Los Angeles Times*. October 14.

U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. (2005). Local Area Personal Income. <http://www.bea.gov/bea/regional/reis/drill.cfm>. Accessed 6/14/05.

**RECOMMENDED CITATION**

Haselhoff, K., Ong, P., & Tran, L. (2005). "Transportation, Economy, and Crime Top LA County Residents' Concerns About the Region ." *SCS Fact Sheet*, Vol. 1, No. 14, UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies.

---

LEWIS CENTER FOR REGIONAL POLICY STUDIES  
UCLA SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
3250 PUBLIC POLICY BUILDING  
LOS ANGELES, CA 90095-1656

FORWARDING SERVICE REQUESTED

First Class U.S. Postage <b>PAID</b> UCLA
--