

***Findings in Brief***

- Californians display a certain ambivalence and contradictoriness when it comes to matters of growth in their own community. While residents overwhelmingly support the idea of encouraging commercial development (78% to 18%), at the same time a majority feels population growth in their community should be discouraged (52% to 40%). This ambivalence is most prominent among those Californians living in the suburbs.
- By a two to one margin, Californians believe that new single family housing should be encouraged in their community. Renters and lower income Californians are the subgroups most likely to feel this way.
- About two in three residents describe suburban sprawl as a very (40%) or somewhat (27%) important problem in their region. This view is shared by majorities in all areas of the state and is particularly strong among those living in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area.
- When Californians are asked to describe in their own words what they believe are the main causes of suburban sprawl, most frequently cited is population growth (26%), followed by a lack of affordable housing (13%). Other factors cited by significant proportions of the public include developers encouraging sprawl (7%), people wanting to get out of the city (6%), a lack of planning (6%), and uncontrolled immigration (6%).
- More traffic and longer commuting time (22%) is mentioned most often as the biggest problem associated with sprawl. Two other problems frequently cited include a loss of open space/poor land management (13%) and increasing costs to local communities to provide public services (11%).
- While Californians overall are evenly divided when asked whether their own county has reached its growth limit, there are large regional variations to this view. While majorities of Los Angeles County and Bay Area residents agree that their growth limit has been reached, most residents in other areas disagree.
- By a 70% to 25% margin, Californians overwhelmingly support the idea of the state requiring cities and counties to create a regional plan to manage growth and land use issues.
- Opinions are more divided when it comes to whether a regional plan should be used to guide growth and land use decisions or whether such decisions should be left up to each city and county. Statewide, 53% support making such decisions at the regional level, while 43% favor retaining this authority within their own local governments. Residents of rural areas or small and medium size towns are more apt to favor retaining local control.

***Californians ambivalent with regard to growth***

California residents display a certain ambivalence and contradictoriness when asked about growth and development matters. By a greater than four-to-one margin (78% to 18%) residents strongly support the idea of encouraging commercial growth in their communities over the next several years. On the other hand, a majority of Californians (52%) feels that one of the byproducts of commercial growth – population growth – should be discouraged in their community.

While large majorities of residents in all areas of the state support the idea of encouraging commercial development in their communities over the next several years, some differences are evident in public attitudes toward population depending on one's place of residence. Those living in the suburbs, while just as likely as other Californians to favor commercial development, are the most likely subgroup to feel that population growth in their area should be discouraged (62% discouraged vs. 31% encouraged). By contrast, people who reside in small or medium sized towns or who live in rural areas hold more divided opinions with regard to population growth, with 45% feeling it should be encouraged and 47% saying it should be discouraged.

<b>Table 1 Opinions of California residents on commercial and population growth</b>				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Place of residence*</b>		
		<b>Large city</b>	<b>Suburb near large city</b>	<b>Small/med. sized town/rural area</b>
<b>Commercial growth</b>				
<u>Encourage</u>	<u>78%</u>	<u>78%</u>	<u>83%</u>	<u>77%</u>
Strongly	45	48	45	45
Somewhat	33	30	38	32
<u>Discourage</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>19</u>
Somewhat	12	13	11	13
Strongly	6	6	5	6
No opinion	4	3	1	4
<b>Population growth</b>				
<u>Encourage</u>	<u>40%</u>	<u>40%</u>	<u>32%</u>	<u>45%</u>
Strongly	12	16	8	13
Somewhat	28	24	24	32
<u>Discourage</u>	<u>52</u>	<u>53</u>	<u>61</u>	<u>47</u>
Somewhat	35	33	42	32
Strongly	17	20	19	15
No opinion	8	7	7	8

\* Self-described

### **Support for more new single family housing**

By a two to one margin (60% to 30%), Californians believe that new single family housing should be encouraged in their community.

An examination of the population subgroups finds that support for new single family housing is greatest among renters and lower income Californians, while homeowners living in higher end homes and persons with annual incomes of \$80,000 or more are more divided in their views on this.

**Table 2**  
**Opinions regarding new single family housing**

	<b>Should be encouraged</b>	<b>Should be discouraged</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
Statewide	60%	30	10
<b>Homeownership/value of home</b>			
Renter	68%	22	10
Homeowner (total)	54%	37	9
Less than \$300,000	60%	31	9
\$300,000 or more	45%	47	8
<b>Household income</b>			
Less than \$40,000	71%	21	8
\$40,000 - \$79,999	57%	35	8
\$80,000 or more	50%	42	8

### **Sprawl an important regional problem in all areas of the state**

About two in three Californians currently believe that suburban sprawl is a very important (40%) or somewhat important (27%) problem in their region. This compares to 30% of the public who feel sprawl is not an important problem where they live.

The belief that sprawl is a major regional problem is shared by majorities of residents in all areas of the state, particularly among those living in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area.

**Table 3**  
**Importance of the problem of suburban "sprawl" in the region where you live**

	<b>Very important</b>	<b>Somewhat important</b>	<b>Not important</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
Statewide	40%	27	30	3
<b>Region</b>				
Los Angeles County	40%	28	28	4
Other Southern California	36%	24	34	6
Central Valley*	36%	29	32	3
San Francisco Bay Area	48%	30	20	2
Other Northern California*	37%	22	38	3

\* Small sample size

### **Population growth and lack of affordable housing seen as main causes of sprawl**

When Californians are asked to describe in their own words what they believe are the main causes of suburban sprawl, they offer a wide range of comments. Respondents' answers were recorded verbatim during the survey and were later coded into general categories of response.

Most frequently cited as a cause of sprawl is population growth, volunteered by 26% of the public. Next most frequently mentioned are comments relating to a lack of affordable housing and the availability of cheaper land in outlying areas (13%). Other factors cited by significant proportions of Californians relate to the view that developers are encouraging sprawl (7%), people want to get out of the city (6%), a lack of planning (6%) and uncontrolled immigration (6%).

**Table 4**  
**What are the main causes of sprawl? (volunteered replies)**

	<b>%</b>
Population growth/more people wanting to live here	26%
Lack of affordable housing/cheaper cost of land	13
Developers encouraging it	7
People wanting to get out of the city	6
Lack of planning	6
Uncontrolled immigration	6
High costs of living	5
Work, employers are spreading out	4
People wanting less crime, drug problems	4
People want a better way of life	3
The booming economy	2
Government policies encourage it	2
People wanting to avoid traffic, parking problems	1
People wanting better schools for their kids	1
Other mentions	7
Don't know/no answer	24

(Adds to more than 100% due to multiple mentions)

### **Traffic seen as the biggest problem associated with sprawl**

When Californians are asked to state in their own words what they believe are the biggest problems associated with sprawl, the most commonly volunteered response relates to more traffic and longer commuting time (22%). Two other problems frequently cited include the loss of open space/too many houses or malls/poor land management (13%) and increased costs to local communities associated with providing public services such as sewers, roads and schools (11%).

A long list of other problems is cited by between 4% and 7% of the public in this setting. These include: too many people/overcrowding (7%), the deterioration of the cities (6%), more pollution, poorer air quality (6%), affordable housing becoming more difficult to find (5%), a lack of water (4%), and a loss of jobs in the cities (4%).

**Table 5**  
**What are the biggest problems associated with sprawl?**  
**(volunteered replies)**

	%
More traffic/longer commutes	22%
Loss of open space/too many houses, shopping malls/ poor land management	13
Increased costs to suburban governments to provide new sewers, roads, schools, services	11
Too many people/overcrowding	7
Deterioration of the cities/leading to more crime, more drug problems	6
More pollution, poorer air quality	6
Affordable housing becoming harder to find	5
Lack of water/water supply problems	4
Loss of jobs in the cities	4
Loss of a sense of neighborhood, community	2
Other mentions	10
Don't know/no answer	29

*(Adds to more than 100% due to multiple mentions)*

***Views about whether their county has reached its growth limit vary by region***

The statewide public is about evenly divided, with 47% agreeing and 49% disagreeing, when asked whether their county has reached its limit with respect to the amount of growth and development it can handle.

However, there are large regional variations about this across the state. For example, majorities of residents of Los Angeles County as well as those living in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area agree that their county has reached its growth and development limit.

On the other hand, majorities of residents in the Central Valley, areas of Southern California other than Los Angeles, and in Northern California outside the Bay Area disagree with this assessment.

**Table 6**  
**“The county where I live has reached its limit in respect to the amount of growth and development it can handle.”**

	Agree	Disagree	No opinion
Statewide	47%	49	4
<u>Region</u>			
Los Angeles County	55%	41	4
Other Southern California	42%	54	4
Central Valley*	36%	57	7
San Francisco Bay Area	57%	39	4
Other Northern California*	21%	74	5

\* Small sample size

***Broad support for the state requiring cities and counties to create a regional plan to manage growth***

By a nearly three-to-one margin (70% to 25%), Californians favor the idea of the state requiring cities and counties to create a joint regional plan to manage growth and land use issues.

While there is two to one support for this kind of state policy in all areas of the state, residents of large cities favor it by a greater than four to one margin.

**Table 7**  
**Should the state government require cities and counties in a region to create a joint regional plan on growth and land use issues**

	Yes, good idea	No, bad idea	No opinion
Statewide	70%	25	5
<u>Place of residence</u>			
Large city	78%	17	5
Suburb near large city	64%	31	5
Small/medium town/rural area	70%	25	5

***Closer division of opinions about whether local governments should give up control over land use decisions***

Opinions are more divided when state residents are asked whether a regional plan should guide growth and land use decisions in their area or whether decisions about this should be left up to each city and county. Statewide, 53% favor the idea of making growth and land use decisions at the regional level, while 43% favor retaining this decision-making authority within their own local city or county government.

While majorities of the residents of large cities and those living in suburban areas around large cities favor a regional approach, a plurality of the residents of rural areas or small or medium size towns favors retaining local control.

**Table 8**  
**Should your area make joint regional decisions on growth and land use issues or should each city or county be allowed to make its own decisions?**

	Cities/counties		
	Regional control	make own decisions	No Opinion
Statewide	53%	43	4
<u>Place of residence</u>			
Large city	61%	35	4
Suburb near large city	56%	41	3
Small/medium town/rural area	46%	50	4

## ***About The Survey***

*The findings in this report are based on a survey conducted April 19 – 25, 2002 among a representative sample of 510 California adults. Professor Robert W. Wassmer of California State University, Sacramento assisted in the development of the issues and questions posed as part of the Field Institute's Academic Fellowship Program. Interviewing was completed by telephone in English and Spanish using a random digit dial sampling methodology, which selects telephone exchanges within all area codes serving California in proportion to population. From each exchange a random sample of telephone numbers are created by adding random digits to the telephone exchange selected, thus permitting access to all telephone numbers, both listed and unlisted. Within each household one adult is selected using a systematic respondent selection procedure. Up to six calls are made to each randomly selected household to reach an eligible adult. During the data processing phase the overall sample was weighted slightly to adjust the survey sample to known parameters of the state's adult population.*

*According to statistical theory survey results from the overall statewide sample have a sampling error of +/- 4.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Subgroups reported in this release, which have the following sample sizes, are subject to wider sampling error ranges: large cities (119), suburbs (133), small/medium sized town/rural (251), Los Angeles County (134), other Southern California (165), Central Valley (75), San Francisco Bay Area (107), other Northern California (29), renter (185), homeowner (315), home value less than \$300,000 (179), home value \$300,000 or more (119), household income less than \$40,000 (185), household income \$40,000 - \$79,999 (137), household income \$80,000 or more (144). The reader is cautioned that there are other possible sources of error in any survey. Different results could occur because of biases in question wording or sequencing, or through undetected errors in sampling, interviewing or data processing. Extensive efforts were made to minimize such potential errors.*

## ***About The Field Institute***

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### **Officers**

Officers of The Field Institute are Mervin Field, Mark DiCamillo and Dr. E. Deborah Jay.

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