

Hawai'i Perspectives

Winter 2023
Report

Understanding the Mindset
of Hawai'i Residents



An Initiative of
Pacific Resource
Partnership





(Left to right) Kiara L. and Hāloa D., and Kailee D. and Aydan L., all moved away from Hawai'i. Of the four, only Hāloa D. has made it back to the islands. The others are finding it financially difficult to do so.

A Population Frustrated by Chronic Issues

On August 8, 2023, Lāhainā, Maui was devastated by a catastrophic wildfire that claimed the lives of 100 people and destroyed more than 2,200 structures, resulting in a significant loss of homes and businesses. Beyond the tragic loss of lives, the disaster placed additional strain on residents already grappling with an exorbitant cost of living, a severe shortage of affordable housing, and a growing homeless population.

For many, Lāhainā has come to symbolize the chronic economic and social issues that challenge the well-being of our island communities. The Winter 2023 edition of Hawai'i Perspectives dives into these and other issues that matter most to Hawai'i residents. It reveals a population divided over

the importance of competing issues relative to their lives and Hawai'i's current and future direction. While many believe Hawai'i is veering off course, others remain staunchly optimistic. Yet, even where there is agreement it's colored by a prevailing sense of concern that Hawai'i is at an inflection point, as evidenced by the recent three-year average of 12,000 residents departing the state every year despite having a deep love for Hawai'i and a powerful desire to remain here with families and friends.

Our hope is that the voices of Hawai'i residents captured by Hawai'i Perspectives will help to guide policymakers and residents alike in their decision-making.

We welcome your questions and feedback. Contact us at info@prp-hawaii.com

Pacific Resource Partnership (PRP) has been a contributing member of the community for more than 35 years, working on behalf of the 6,000 men and women employed as union carpenters and 250 large and small contractors. With our capabilities in research, industry relations, and project and civic advocacy, we are committed to building a stronger, more sustainable Hawai'i in a way that promotes a vibrant economy, creates jobs, and enhances the quality of life for all residents.





“

Our parents had or could have the opportunity to buy homes, because of how cheap it was. But not in this economy. We can't afford those kinds of things.”

— Kailee D.

Aydan L., Kailee D. and Everly
Aydan L. (right) was born on O'ahu and grew up on Maui. He envisioned a future on the continent for himself, Kailee D., and daughter Everly that was out of reach in Hawai'i.

Methodology

A statewide survey of 897 full-time, adult Hawai'i residents was conducted between October 7 and November 16, 2023 using a mixed-mode methodology that included telephone (cell phones and landlines) and online invitations. This methodology is widely accepted as best practice for reaching a broad and representative cross section of the general population.

A stratified sampling design was used to be able to reliably view results by county. Within the sample, 411 interviews were conducted in Honolulu County, 206 in Hawai'i County, 164 in Maui County, and 116 in Kaua'i County. Data was then weighted to reflect the correct proportion of adults by ethnicity and island.

The margin of error for the statewide sample of 897 survey participants is +/- 3.27 percentage points with a 95% level of confidence. The margin of error for subgroups varies and may be higher.

Due to rounding, "totals" of the individual components may differ by +/-1.

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ON THE COVER: With so many challenges facing Hawai'i and the U.S., Kailee D. and Aydan L. look to the future with a sense of angst, while their daughter Everly is counting on decision-makers to solve persistent and vexing problems.

Anthology Research

Anthology Research is a Honolulu-based full-service market research firm founded in 1995 that provides rigorous quantitative and qualitative research services to clients throughout the Pacific Region.

Leveraging its experienced team of telephone interviewers and the latest in online polling technology, Anthology has conducted polling programs for numerous federal, state and county political races, as well as sought public opinion on some of the most important issues facing the Islands.

Daubert Design Co.

Daubert Design Co. is a branding and creative design consultancy based in Honolulu. Founder and designer Warren Daubert is known for his ability to humanize brands by creating distinctive visual identities that tell a brand's story and communicate its purpose. Frequent collaborator James Nakamura specializes in crafting visual narratives through a variety of mediums. Both have worked with clients in multiple industries including renewable energy, environmental conservation and sustainability, IT, retail, publications, and fashion. Daubert is the former creative director of Hawaii Business Magazine. James Nakamura is currently the Creative Director for HONOLULU Magazine.

An Erosion of Confidence



“

People will always fight against building and development. And for me, I don't see why because that's gonna be what keeps our culture here.”

— Hāloa D.

Hāloa D.

From Maui but left for college and stayed to play professional baseball. Injuries ended his playing career, but he has returned to the Valley Isle and now works for a local nonprofit. His girlfriend Kiara, also from Maui, is working to join him.

Wishing for Better Days

► When Hawai'i residents contemplate the state of Hawai'i and the U.S. in 2023 versus four years ago, their sentiments are significantly more pessimistic. Families are perceived as being worse off financially, with minimal expectations for improvement.

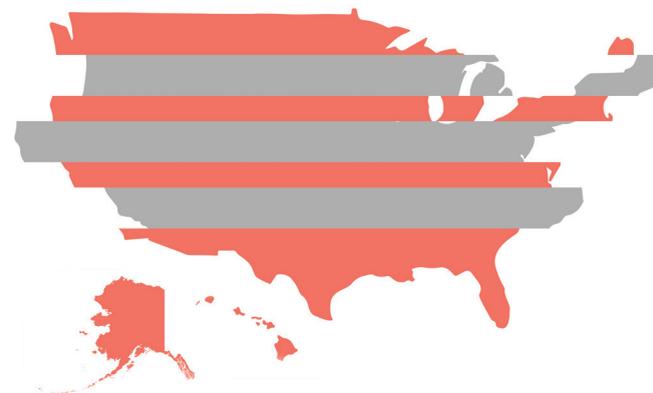
While many factors contribute to an increased sense of pessimism, structural issues such as skyrocketing home prices and mortgage rates, and spiraling inflation are also on the minds of many who suddenly find themselves priced out of the real estate market or paying more at the grocery store.

Pessimism by County

Since 2019 residents of three of Hawai'i's four counties agree that things have gotten worse in their counties. The outlier is the County of Kaua'i, where the prevailing feeling is that things have stayed about the same.

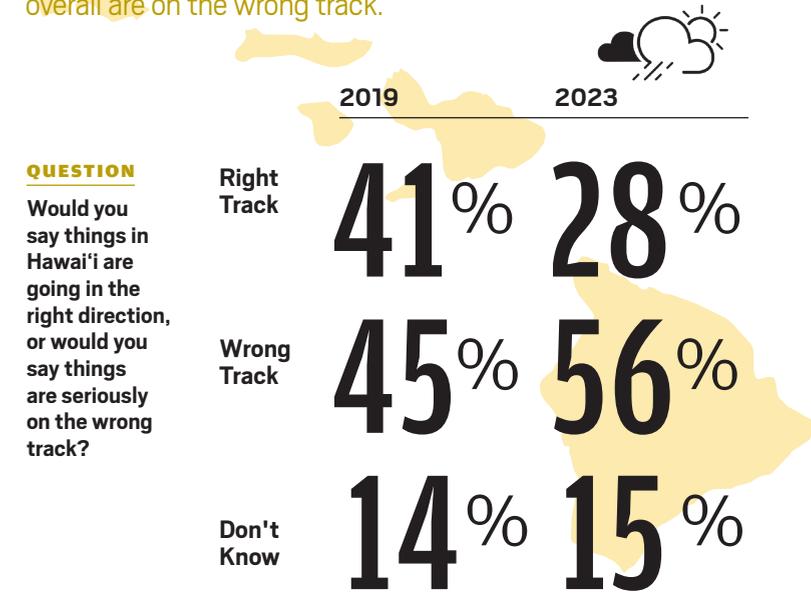
QUESTION

Would you say things in the United States are going in the right direction, or would you say things are seriously on the wrong track?



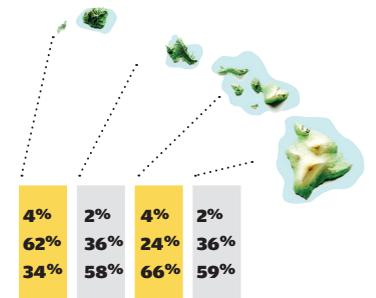
Why So Gloomy?

Most residents feel that Hawai'i and the U.S. overall are on the wrong track.

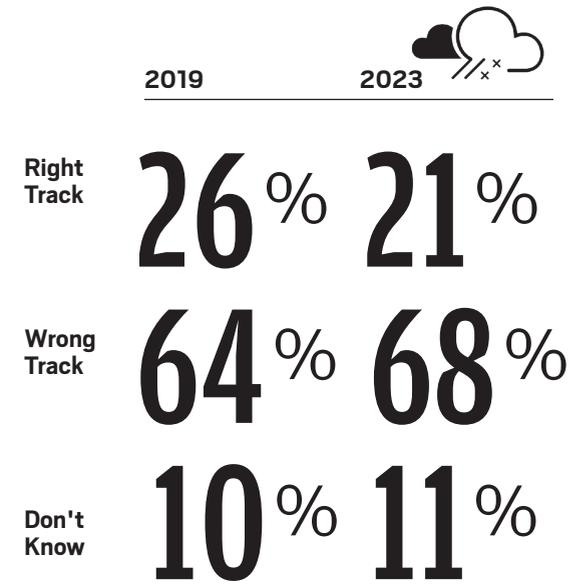


QUESTION

Would you say things in Hawai'i are going in the right direction, or would you say things are seriously on the wrong track?



MY COUNTY HAS GOTTEN BETTER
MY COUNTY HAS STAYED ABOUT THE SAME
MY COUNTY HAS GOTTEN WORSE



Are You Better Off Today?

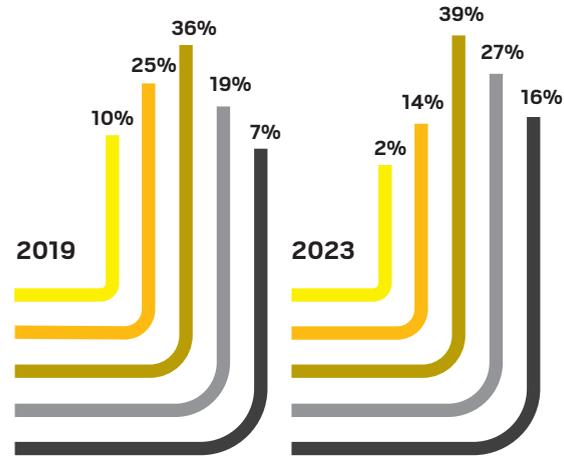
► **Younger and older generations** agree on one thing - 48% of residents ages 18-34 feel their financial situation is getting worse with low expectations for improvement. 44% of residents ages 50-64 agree with that sentiment.



QUESTION

Would you say you and your family are better off or worse off financially now than a year ago?

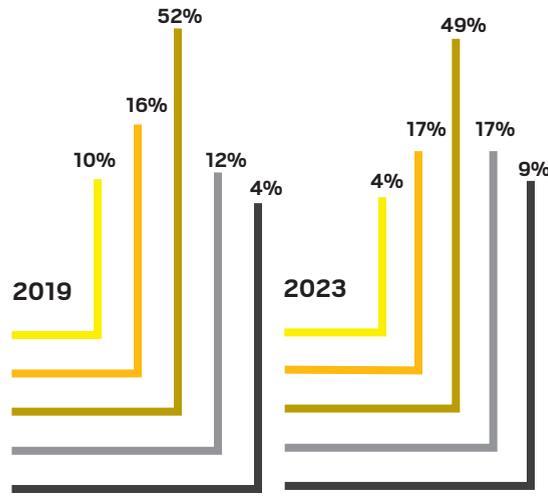
MUCH BETTER OFF
SOMEWHAT BETTER OFF
ABOUT THE SAME
SOMEWHAT WORSE OFF
MUCH WORSE OFF



QUESTION

Looking ahead, do you think in a year from now you and your family will be better off financially, worse off, or about the same as now?

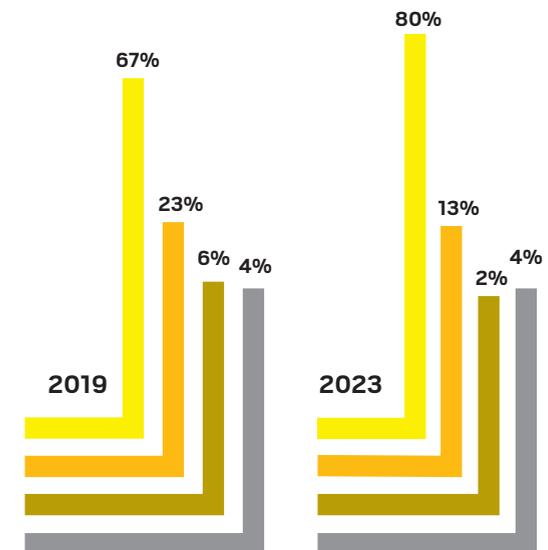
MUCH BETTER OFF
SOMEWHAT BETTER OFF
ABOUT THE SAME
SOMEWHAT WORSE OFF
MUCH WORSE OFF



QUESTION

Do you think the gap between rich and poor in Hawai'i is getting wider, staying about the same, or getting narrower?

GETTING WIDER
STAYING ABOUT THE SAME
GETTING NARROWER
DON'T KNOW



A Growing Gap Between Rich and Poor

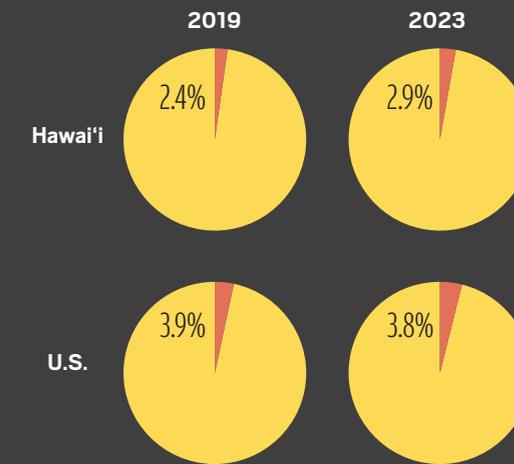
► **The majority of residents believe** the distance is growing between the haves and have-nots.



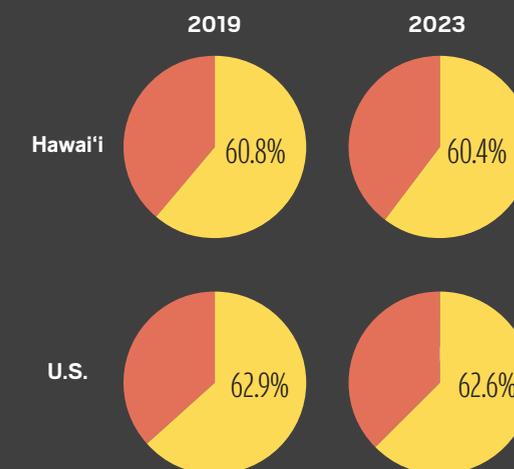
A World of Change

► **When comparing key economic indicators** in 2019 to those of 2023, it's clear that a lot has changed. Most notably, the median home cost in Hawai'i, average mortgage rate, and the rate of inflation are all higher now, in some cases significantly so. It's a vexing problem for those seeking a solution to Hawai'i's lack of affordable housing.

Unemployment rate



Labor participation rate (in October)



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis

Average mortgage rate (30-Year Fixed Rate Mortgage Average in the US; not seasonally adjusted)



Source: Freddie Mac, Retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis

Median household income (or wage growth year-over-year)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Median home cost (single-family home)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Source: Honolulu Board of Realtors

Inflation Rate: January 2021 through November 2023

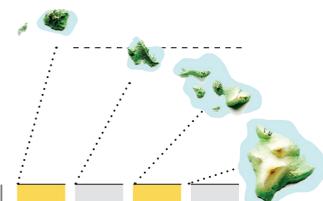


Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Household Stressors and Priorities

► **Hawai'i faces a host of complex issues** that state and local governments are best equipped to address. The need for affordable housing, a viable solution to homelessness, and finding a way to mitigate the high cost of living — in that order — top the list statewide as well as county by county.

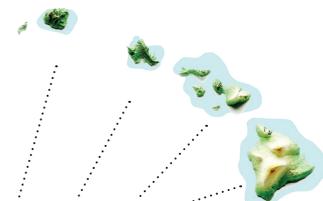
Top Issues that State Government Should Address



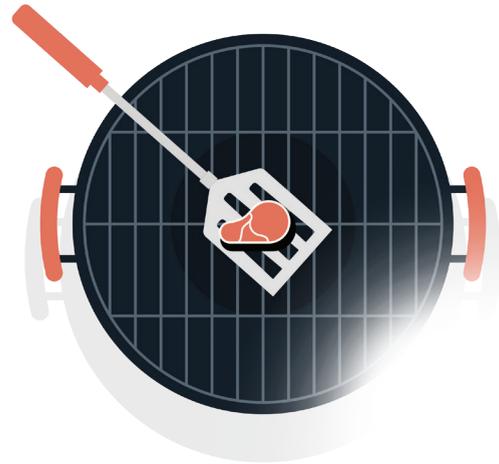
	Honolulu	Mauka	Maukaui	Maukaui
AFFORDABLE HOUSING	38%	25%	36%	25%
HOMELESSNESS	11%	24%	2%	9%
HIGH COST OF LIVING	18%	14%	6%	12%
MAUI/ LĀHAINĀ WILDFIRES	5%	9%	18%	14%
ECONOMY/JOB	1%	7%	7%	5%
LOCAL GOVERNMENT FIX	7%	5%	8%	8%
CRIME/ VIOLENCE	0%	5%	0%	6%

Homelessness and Crime Concerns

Residents on every island characterize the growing ranks of homelessness and crime as an issue that “worries me a lot.” An overwhelming majority perceive both as having gotten worse.



	Honolulu	Mauka	Maukaui	Maukaui
HOMELESSNESS IN MY COUNTY HAS GOTTEN WORSE	87%	86%	82%	86%
CRIME, VIOLENCE, AND DRUG ABUSE IN MY COUNTY HAS GOTTEN WORSE	62%	74%	57%	81%



What Keeps You Awake at Night?

The cost of living, lack of affordable housing, and the growing number of homeless living on our streets are our three greatest worries. We also worry a lot about climate change, lack of good-paying jobs, and the high cost of childcare.

	Greatest worry	Worries me a lot
The cost of living, such as the high cost of groceries and utilities, makes it hard to live here, let alone put money in savings	44%	77%
There is not enough housing that local Hawai'i families can afford	16%	76%
The number of homeless living on our streets	12%	76%
Climate change is leading to more devastating natural disasters in Hawai'i	6%	48%
We are losing our aloha spirit in Hawai'i and becoming more divided as a community	5%	51%

Our High Cost of Living Extends to Healthcare

Health insurance can be expensive for both employers and employees, making it challenging for some individuals and families to afford coverage. Most residents believe access to quality, affordable healthcare has gotten worse or stayed the same.

The ability to get affordable, quality healthcare coverage

Gotten worse	43%
Stayed the same	43%
Gotten better	7%
Don't Know	7%

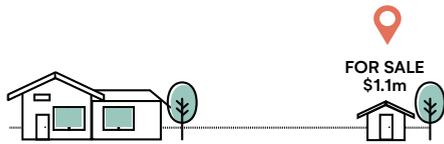
UNATTAINABLE DREAM?

Concerned by an Abundance of Issues

“

[Hawai'i] is paradise and we do love it. But it costs an arm and a leg, and we really can't afford that.”

— Aydan L.



Affordable Housing — The Elephant in the Room

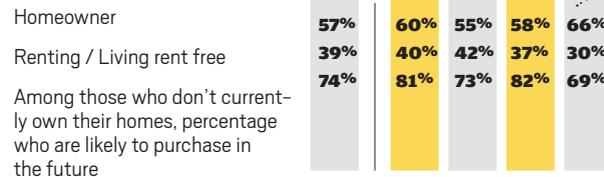
► **Affordable housing is the single most important issue** we face in Hawai'i at both the county level and statewide. The high cost of living and homelessness are also top of mind and are formidable issues by themselves. But among the three, it is affordable housing that has the potential to produce the greatest benefit to the state and residents.

Homeownership Remains the Dream



Of those who participated in the survey, 57% are homeowners. 39% either rent or live rent-free. A significant number of those who rent or live rent-free — 74% — say they are likely to buy a home in the future.

Homeowners, tenants, potential buyers



Affordability — Perception vs. Reality

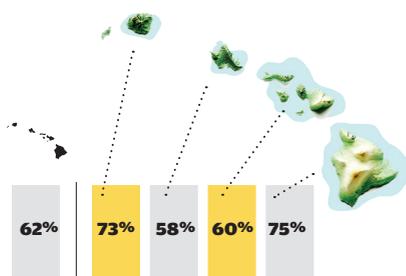
62% of residents define "affordable housing" for a two-bedroom apartment as \$1,500 a month. By contrast, the National Low Income Housing Coalition estimates fair market rent for a 2-bedroom unit in Hawai'i is \$2,175. 86% define "affordable" as a home with a purchase price of \$500,000 or less.

QUESTION

What do you consider to be "affordable housing" for rent or mortgage for a two-bedroom, two-bath apartment?

MONTHLY RENT / MORTGAGE	PURCHASE PRICE
62% say \$1,500 or less	86% say \$500,000 or less
38% say more than \$1,500	14% say more than \$500,000

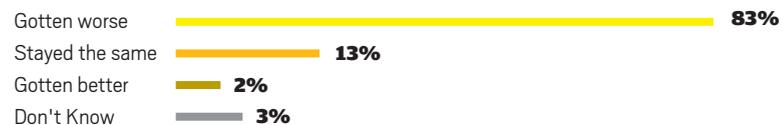
Percentage by county of those who feel monthly rent for "affordable housing" should be \$1,500 or less for a 2-bedroom, 2-bath apartment.



Housing Availability — From Bad to Worse

Most people perceive the availability of housing that their family can afford as having gotten significantly worse.

The availability of housing that families like mine can afford



Obstacles to Housing Development

To build more affordable housing, we must remove many of the obstacles that are preventing new construction from happening in the first place. Residents were asked to consider six factors that contribute to Hawai'i's housing crisis, and to list them in order of importance according to their impact on housing development.



How Can We Facilitate Affordable Housing?

Residents supported a host of ideas to make affordable housing happen more quickly, including a temporary suspension of laws that slow the permitting and approval of housing projects.

Net Support (Somewhat + Strongly)

57% Speed up the development of housing across the state by temporarily suspending laws that slow permitting and approval of housing projects

10% Finding land for housing

18% Cost of materials

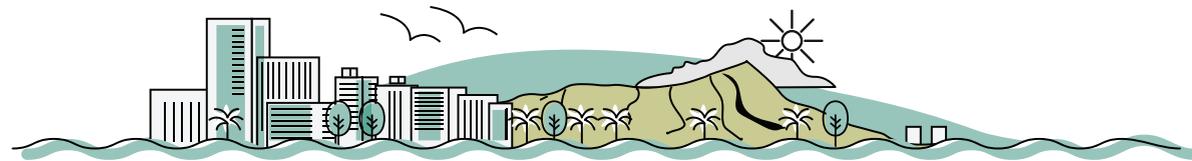
51% Government permitting

“

The cornerstone for the working-class family for building wealth is owning property, sadly. It's one of the few assets we can own as working-class people that's worth anything.”

— Nathan E.

A Quick Look Beyond the Usual Challenges

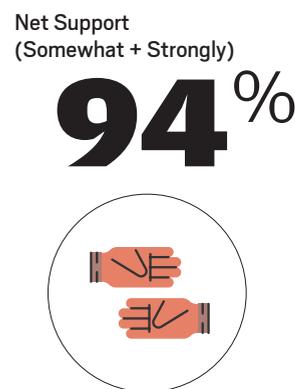


► **Affordable housing may be the elephant in the room**, but it alone is not the only issue residents perceive as affecting Hawai'i. Hawai'i — like other U.S. states — must find ways to balance a wealth of competing priorities to develop and implement effective solutions to a wide range of challenging issues.

Workforce Development

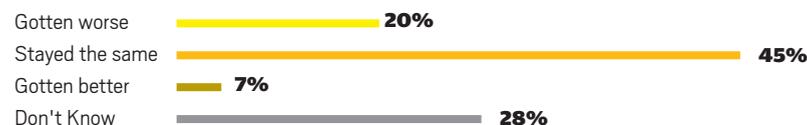
Awareness is growing that a college education isn't the only path — or even the best one — to a rewarding career. The preponderance of respondents support funding vocational training that prepares students for an established career immediately upon high school graduation.

Fund programs to promote careers that do not require a college degree but offer training and/or apprenticeships that offer a living wage

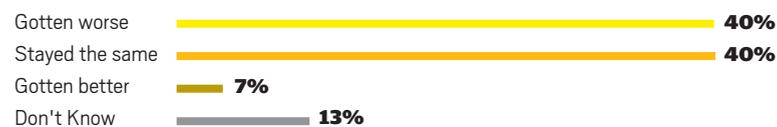


Residents are concerned over the quality of public school education, the need to ensure young people are trained for the jobs of the future, and the affordability of a college degree — all key components in successful workforce development.

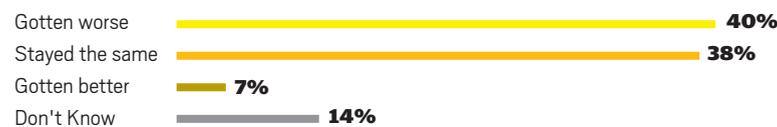
The availability of trade or vocational programs



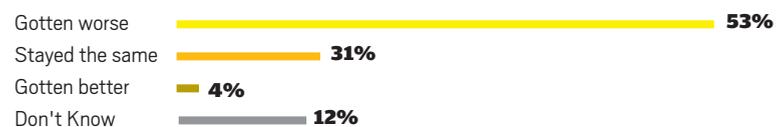
The quality of education from K through HS



Training our young people for jobs of the future

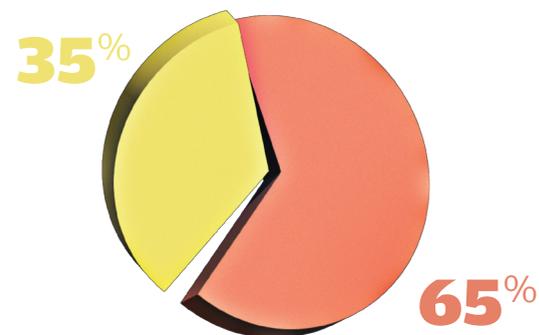


The affordability of a college/ university degree



Tourism

On the question of whether we should allow more visitors to Hawai'i or fewer, the promise of jobs for residents and opportunities for small businesses tipped the scale in favor of growing our visitor count.

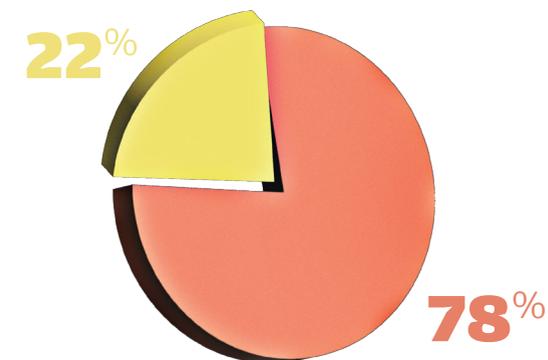


We should allow fewer visitors to Hawai'i, even if that means fewer jobs for residents and less opportunity for small businesses

We should allow more visitors to Hawai'i to create jobs for residents and opportunity for small businesses

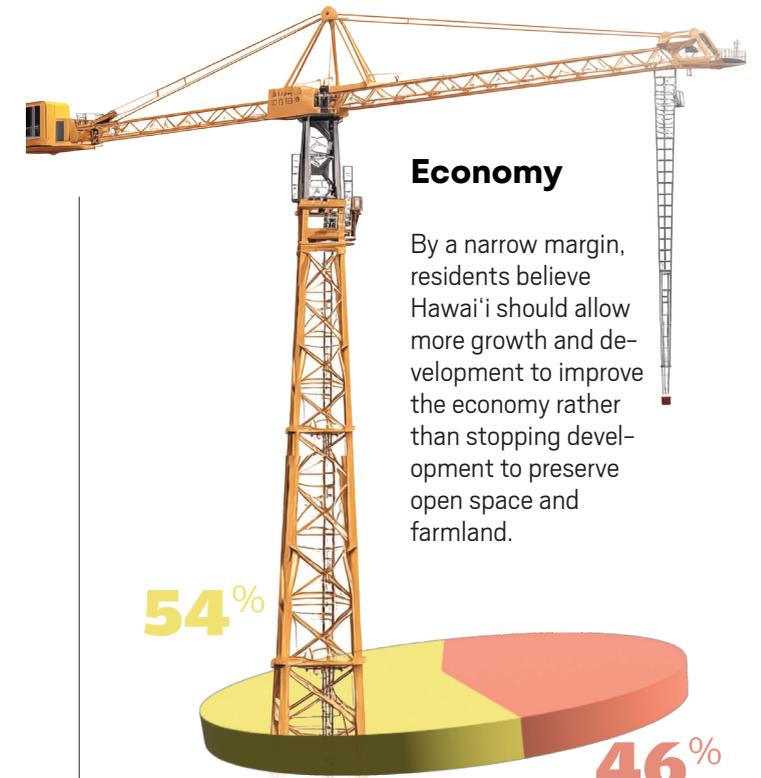
Climate Change

Hawai'i is uniquely vulnerable to climate change, chiefly sea level rise and its impact on tourism and fragile ecosystems. Hawai'i is doing its part to minimize global warming by transitioning to 100% renewable energy by 2045, but most residents say they are unwilling to support this goal if it means a higher cost of living.



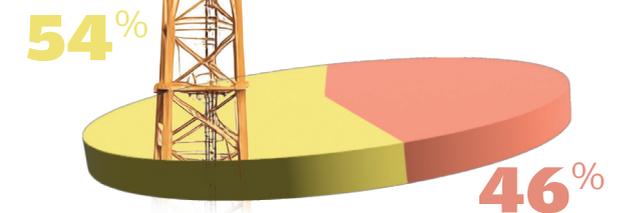
To meet Hawai'i's 100% renewable energy goal, I am willing to pay a higher cost of living

To meet Hawai'i's 100% renewable energy goal, I am NOT willing to pay a higher cost of living



Economy

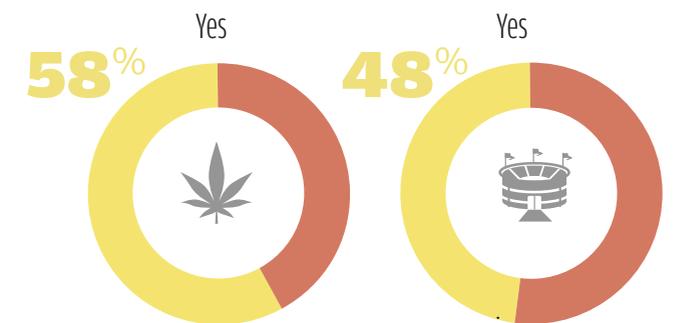
By a narrow margin, residents believe Hawai'i should allow more growth and development to improve the economy rather than stopping development to preserve open space and farmland.



We should allow more growth and development to create jobs, improve the economy and provide more affordable housing for middle class families

We should NOT allow any more development because it will lead to a permanent loss of open space and farmland and add more people and traffic

Legalizing marijuana for recreational purposes and constructing a new Aloha Stadium could generate tax revenue that would help boost Hawai'i's economy in the years ahead. While legalization of marijuana received strong support, residents were divided over rebuilding Aloha Stadium.



Legalize recreational marijuana to allow possession, manufacture, and sale of marijuana by and to adults, under state licensing, regulation, and taxation

Rebuild Aloha Stadium at a cost of \$400 million to attract more concerts and sporting events and increase tourism

Should I Stay, or Should I Go?

“

What keeps me here is the culture of family and all the nice things about Hawai'i – the people, the food. Just the places – it's not like the mainland.”

— Kahi K.

“

Before I left, Hawai'i, we had a two-bedroom apartment. That was about 10 years ago and cost us about \$1,600 bucks a month. And here in Ohio, we own a four-bedroom house and the mortgage payment is a little over \$700 a month.”

— Nathan E.

Unaffordable Paradise

Residents are Torn About Leaving

Statewide, 51% of households are affected in some way by outmigration. 44% — versus 45% four years ago — said they have thought seriously about leaving the state. 11% reported someone in their household recently left Hawai'i.

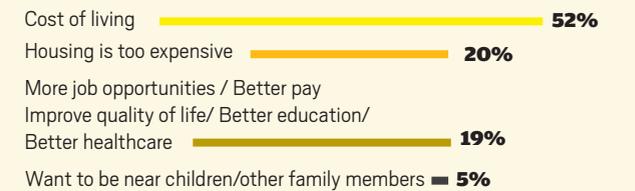


Reasons for Leaving Hawai'i

The state's high cost of living and lack of affordable housing are the top reasons residents leave Hawai'i. Other triggers include better job opportunities, which resonates strongest in Maui County where the University of Hawai'i Economic Research Organization estimates roughly 11% of residents became unemployed as the result of the Lāhainā wildfire.

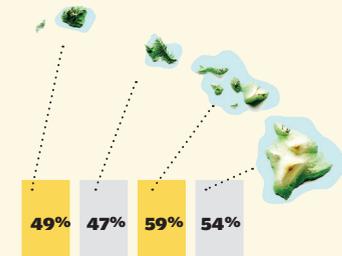
QUESTION

Why would you leave Hawai'i?



A Lackluster Job Market

Residents of all four Hawai'i counties say there aren't enough good-paying, local jobs.

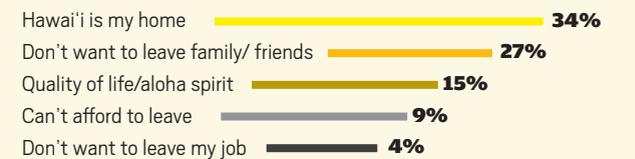


Reasons for Staying in Hawai'i

Hawai'i is a special place, as those who make sacrifices to live here would be the first to tell you. Most people who end up staying despite having to endure some hardships remain in the islands for a simple reason: Hawai'i is their home.

QUESTION

Why do you want to stay in Hawai'i?



Moving Forward Together

Embodying our commitment to People, Relationships, and Promise, in 2019 PRP launched Hawai'i Perspectives, the state's largest public opinion survey at that time. Now, four years later, it revisits a landscape shaped by COVID-19, the Lāhainā wildfire, and severe economic shocks. Despite efforts to navigate these challenges and many others, our state grapples with persistent issues: a high cost of living, limited affordable housing, and a growing homeless population. These long-standing problems, intensified by the pandemic, diminish optimism among Hawai'i residents.

Yet, all is not lost. Amidst the pessimism and uncertainties described by this survey's respondents, there is hope, resilience, and commitment to invest in Hawai'i and one another. Our islands have weathered many trying times, and difficult times make for a hardy people. Like other challenges Hawai'i has overcome, the solutions to our longstanding issues lie within each of us. Through collaboration and compromise, we can find a balance of creative and meaningful answers that benefit us all.

— Pacific Resource Partnership





Kailee D.

PRP INITIATIVES

Working For the People of Hawai'i

Pacific Resource Partnership is committed to a vibrant and sustainable economy, good paying middle-class jobs, housing, 21st century schools, apprenticeship programs and policies that enhance the quality of life for all of Hawai'i's residents.

People, Relationships, Promise

Kahi K. Residing in Waimānalo and a lifetime Windward O’ahu resident; Kahi is a recent retiree and grandparent. Kahi’s family is adapting to Hawai’i’s new normal while prioritizing family and values including responsibility, respect, and cooperation.

“There’s a lot of sacrifices that we do [to live in Hawai’i]. We don’t go out as much. We try to eat at home. We try to do things that are entertaining at home, rather than going to a \$20 movie nowadays. When they reopened after COVID, things just got out of hand.”

— Kahi K.

PRP Initiatives

Industry Integrity

Non-compliance with Hawai’i’s labor, employment and construction industry laws affects legitimate businesses in all industries, every taxpayer and the entire state economy. In partnership with government officials, businesses, workers and the public, PRP is committed to raising awareness of these fraudulent activities and ensuring unscrupulous operators do not take advantage of workers and those living in the community.

Research

Data informs us. The construction industry plays a vital role in both sustaining and stimulating Hawai’i’s economy. PRP tracks new projects, building permits, and public works activity, using data to analyze the industry’s direction and impact. Research products also include Hawai’i Perspectives and data-driven work on specific projects and areas of activity meant to better our understanding of the state of the industry, both locally and statewide, as well as Hawai’i’s economy.

Partners For Democracy

Partners for Democracy is PRP’s non-partisan civic leadership development program designed for emerging leaders who have a passion for political advocacy and a desire to bring about change in Hawai’i. The Partners for Democracy program teaches participants how to develop and execute successful political and public policy advocacy campaigns for those interested in making positive change by taking on leadership roles and advocating for economic, community, and social issues.

Executive Leadership Series

The Executive Leadership Series is an intensive, 10-month leadership development program, custom-tailored for Hawai’i’s next generation of construction leaders. Led by some of Hawai’i’s top design and construction industry consultants and practitioners, the program covers a broad range of topics required for success in the construction industry, from personal development to business essentials.

Hawai’i Directory of Public Officials

A public service provided by PRP, the Hawai’i Directory of Public Officials is a guide to elected and appointed federal, state, and county government representatives. This directory has been an invaluable tool for civic engagement for over 20 years. PRP assumed responsibility for this publication from the Hawai’i Institute for Public Affairs in 2018.

Kākou

KĀKOU is a civic engagement app developed exclusively for Hawai’i. It enables users to contact elected officials, register to vote, weigh in on hot-button issues, and advocate alongside local nonprofit organizations. The app allows access to the Hawai’i Directory of Public Officials and provides a tool for creating support for legislation and community efforts.

Download KĀKOU for free now:



To learn more about any of PRP’s initiatives or programs, visit prp-hawaii.com or call (808) 528-5557.

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