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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 deniers, anti-maskers, and anti-vaxxers *do not* represent Orange County.

Despite public protests and the pronouncements of some Orange County officials, 83 percent (83%) of those surveyed said that the coronavirus is a real threat and 80 percent (80%) said it is *not fully* under control here. We found overwhelming support for government efforts to combat the virus including rules on social distancing (90%) and a national mask mandate (70%). These prescriptions have been described as an unconstitutional infringement of civil liberties and individual freedom. Seventy-three percent (73%) said government efforts to fight the virus were either about right (38%) or did not go far enough (35%). Only about a quarter (27%) felt that government efforts to combat the virus went too far.

While only 13 percent (13%) said the pandemic had caused them severe economic hardship, there is widespread support for an economic stimulus package, with nearly half of those surveyed saying (49%) the plan currently being promoted by President Joe Biden does not go far enough. Respondents also put containing the virus (64%) ahead of rebuilding the economy. Respondents have more confidence in health professionals such as Dr. Anthony Fauci or the Orange County Health Care Agency than elected officials such as the Orange County Board of Supervisors or Governor Gavin Newsom to deal with the pandemic. There was a sharp partisan divide among those planning to get vaccinated. Eighty-one percent (81%) of Democrats versus only 58 percent (58%) of Republicans said they would get vaccinated. A majority (56%) believe schools should reopen immediately provided proper precautions are taken. Once again, there is a major partisan divide, as 84 percent (84%) of Republicans believe this, 54 percent (54%) of Decline to State voters, and 31 percent (31%) of Democrats.

Seventy-nine percent (79%) said that the threat of climate change was a serious problem and seventy percent (70%) said climate change was caused by human activities. This reaffirms the findings from the 2020 Orange County Annual Survey which focused on climate change. The majority of those polled support the governor's electric car mandate. People may love their cars, but they are less attached to the internal combustion engine. Respondents also accepted increased environmental regulations even if this meant higher utility bills. Recent wildfires, which the governor and others attributed to a changing climate, appear to have had a modest impact on attitudes.

President Donald Trump is gone, but polarization remains. Sixty-nine percent (69%) believe the election was fair but 31 percent (31%), a significant minority, do not. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of Republicans think the election was not conducted fairly, whereas 97 percent (97%) of the Democrats and 73 percent (73%) of the Decline to State respondents feel it was fair. Most respondents (57%) say the Congress was right

to impeach Trump for a second time. Only 15 percent (15%) of the Republicans felt the president should be impeached compared to 95 percent (95%) of Democrats and 57 percent (57%) of those who do not belong to one of the major political parties. People across the board say Trump will go down in history as a less-than-average president. Twenty-six percent (26%) of Republicans said he would go down as below average or as a poor president. The comparable figure for Democrats was 91 percent (91%), and Decline to State, 57 percent (57%).

For the second consecutive presidential election since Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Democratic candidate won Orange County. Biden took Orange County and he remains popular here. Sixty-three percent (63%) of those surveyed said they approved of Biden's performance in office, which is higher than his national approval rating (Gallup: 57%). Respondents were cautiously optimistic about the direction of the country—52% believe the U.S. is headed in the right direction, but less than half (43%) felt that California was headed in the right direction.

Orange County is evenly divided about removing Gavin Newsom from office before his term expires in January 2023. About half (48%) of those surveyed say the governor should be recalled. Not surprising, support for the recall is sharply divided along party lines. Eighty percent (80%) of Republicans and the majority of the respondents who say they do not belong to either party (53%) support the recall, but eighty-four percent (84%) of the Democrats do not.

Orange County's three biggest problems, according to respondents, are housing affordability/homelessnes, the coronavirus, and the economy. Housing affordability and homelessness consistently rank in the top three each year when we conduct this study.

A strong majority of county residents (65%) support the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, but there is a substantial difference between partisan affiliation. Ninety-five percent (95%) of Democrats and 73 percent (73%) of Decline to State voters support BLM, compared to only 22 percent (22%) of Republicans. While the past year brought tension between the police and communities they serve in some major American cities, the police are generally looked upon favorably in Orange County. A strong majority responded with either "Excellent" or "Good" when asked about how the police were doing in maintaining public safety, treating the community with respect, responding with the appropriate number of officers, and gaining the trust of local residents. However, a majority (62%) believe the police are doing a "Fair" or "Poor" job at responding to the mental health crisis.

Introduction

Chapman University's Wilkinson College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences is pleased to present the 2021 Orange County Annual Survey Report. Orange County, CA (OC), is a thriving metropolitan area that lies between Los Angeles County to the north, San Diego County to the south, San Bernardino County to the northeast, and Riverside County to the east. The area is home to roughly 3.2 million residents. As of June 2, 2021, 36.9 percent of active voters were registered Democrats, 33.7 percent were Republicans, and 24.1 percent had no party preference.

This marks the fifth countywide survey we have conducted since 2010, and it is the fourth consecutive annual survey we have completed. Each year, our survey focuses a significant portion of questions on a different topic. The 2018 survey explored county residents' views on housing and homelessness, in 2019 the focus was transportation, and last year we researched Orange County's views on climate change. This year, as our country and world endure a pandemic that has greatly affected the lives of all, the survey focuses on COVID-19 and the government's response to the pandemic. Our purpose for conducting these yearly studies is to educate the public and civic leaders on county residents' views of sociopolitical issues and to spark informed debate. We thank Fieldstead & Company and Chapman's Office of Research for sponsoring this study.

Refer to Appendix A for the methodology and Appendix B for a complete list of survey questions and results.

The Coronavirus Pandemic³

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken an enormous toll on Orange County. More than 250,000 people became infected and more than 5,000 died. Schools, businesses, restaurants, gyms, movie theaters, amusement parks, sports venues, and museums were shuttered. Those who could work from home survived relatively unscathed; those who could not faced greater exposure to the virus at work or were laid off, resulting in lost income, eviction, and food insecurity. Efforts to combat the virus aggravated deep political divisions:

- In April 2020, protesters in downtown Huntington Beach claimed the virus was a hoax and that the efforts to curtail it—vaccinations, masks, social distancing, and a lockdown—violated the Constitution.
- In May 2020, Orange County officials refused to enforce Governor Newsom's order to close Orange County beaches.⁴

¹ Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/orangecountycalifornia

² Retrieved from https://www.ocvote.com/datacentral/

³ The Orange County Register published a version of this opening section in a June 2, 2021 op-ed.

⁴ Hannah Fry, Anh Do, Richard Winton, "Will Orange County enforce Newsom beach closure? Officials vow a fight," <u>Los Angeles Times</u>, May 1, 2020. Retrieved from:

- In June 2020, Dr. Nichole Quick, who was then Orange County's chief health officer, resigned because of death threats resulting from her controversial mask order. Protestors showed up at board meetings and at Dr. Quick's home with a banner depicting Dr. Quick as Adolf Hitler.⁵
- In July, despite a surge in coronavirus cases, the conservative Orange County Board of Education recommended that OC schools reopen without masks or social distancing.⁶ The recommendation was ignored by the county's 28 school districts and ridiculed nationally.⁷
- On May 5, 2021, the Orange County Board of Education passed a symbolic resolution against digital vaccine passports for students without their parents' consent even though there was no such plan.⁸
- At its May 11, 2021 meeting, the Orange County Board of Supervisors tabled a proposal to establish a voluntary digital record (passport) of a person's vaccine status, bowing to pressure from the more than 500 angry protestors who packed the chambers and the sidewalks in front of the administration building. The protestors compared the proposed passport program to the yellow stars Nazis ordered Jews to wear as a means of identification and complained that the program was an infringement of their civil liberties. Others claimed the virus was a hoax.⁹
- The following day, May 1, 2021, the Orange County Grand Jury issued a scathing report on the county's handling of the pandemic.¹⁰

https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-05-01/will-orange-county-enforce-newsom-beach-closure-officials-vow-a-fight

https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-06-09/orange-county-public-health-officer-resigns-amid-controversy-over-face-coverings.

https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-07-13/orange-county-board-of-education-recommends-no-masks-social-distancing-when-schools-reopen

https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/14/us/california-orange-county-reopen-school-no-masks-trnd/index.html

https://www.ocregister.com/2021/05/06/oc-board-of-education-revises-untrue-statement-deletes-reference-to-county-health-official/

https://voiceofoc.org/2021/05/oc-grand-jury-issues-scathing-report-on-countys-pandemic-response-and-plans/

⁵ Hannah Fry, Luke Money, "Orange County public health officer resigns in coronavirus controversy," <u>Los Angeles Times.</u> June 9, 2020, Retrieved from:

⁶ Hannah Fry and Sara Cardine, "Orange County education leaders want schools to reopen without masks or social distancing." Los Angeles Times. June 13, 2020, Retrieved from:

⁷ See, for example, Alicia Lee, Jenn Selva and Jack Hannah, "Orange County's largest school districts won't comply with Board of Education vote to return to classroom," <u>CNN</u>, July 15, 2020. Retrieved from:

⁸ Roxana Kopetman, "OC Board of Education revises untrue statement, deletes reference to county health official," <u>Orange County Register</u>, May 6, 20201. Retrieved from:

⁹ Spencer Custodio, "OC Supervisors Cancel Digital Coronavirus Vaccine Records, Hundreds of People Rail Against Vaccine Passports," Voice of OC, May 11, 2021, Retrieved from:

https://voiceofoc.org/2021/05/oc-supervisors-debate-cancelling-digital-coronavirus-vaccine-records-hundreds-of-pe ople-rail-against-vaccine-passports/

¹⁰ Spencer Custodio and Brandon Pho, "OC Grand Jury Issues Scathing Report on County's Pandemic Response, Plans," <u>Voice of OC</u>, May 12, 2021, Retrieved from:

Finally, on May 18 and 19, 2021, protestors lined up in front of the home of Dr.
 Clayton Chau, the head of the Orange County Health Care Agency, to protest a non-existent "vaccine passport" program.¹¹

All of this resulted in unflattering media portrayals of the county as the wellspring of right-wing fanaticism. For example, an article in the Los Angeles Times said, "... right-wing protests in Orange County [have] spiraled into increasingly violent language against ever larger foes, real and imagined. It began with protests and outlandish conspiracies about COVID-19 restrictions, including a harassment campaign that drove out the county's top health officer, and rallies to recall Gov. Gavin Newsom and support Trump."¹²

The question arises: Do the above incidents represent the views of most Orange County residents? Is this who we are? Our findings, in a nutshell, say "No."

We found that the COVID deniers, anti-maskers and anti-vaxxers *do no*t represent Orange County. In fact, we found overwhelming support for social distancing, mask wearing, vaccinations, and the lockdown. Only about a quarter (27%) felt that the government went too far in its efforts to curtail the virus. We also found that respondents have more confidence in health professionals such as Dr. Anthony Fauci and the Orange County Health Care Agency officials than elected officials. However, we did find a major partisan divide among responses. The one thing residents are in agreement is that schools should reopen immediately, provided proper precautions are taken.

Finding #1: Coronavirus Threat Real

Our first finding is that despite public protests and the pronouncements of some Orange County officials, 83 percent (83%) of those surveyed said that the coronavirus is a real threat and 80 percent (80%) said it is **not fully** under control here (Table 1).

¹¹Alicia Robinson, "OC Supervisors denounce protest at county health officer's home," <u>Orange County Register</u>, May 21, 2021, Retrieved from:

https://www.ocregister.com/2021/05/21/oc-supervisors-denounce-protest-at-county-health-officers-home/

12 See "Editorial: Dear Orange County: Coronavirus is the problem, not the efforts to stop its spread,"

Los Angeles Times, November 20, 2020, Retrieved from:

https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2020-11-20/coronavirus-restrictions-orange-county-supervisors and Paige St. John, Anita Chabria, Hannah Fry, Michael Finnegan, "Suburban radicals: Inside the resurgence of right-wing extremism in Orange County," <u>Los Angeles Times</u>, March 21, 2021, Retrieved from: https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-03-21/orange-county-far-right-trump-covid-19

Do you think the coronavirus is a real threat or blown out of proportion?

TABLE 1

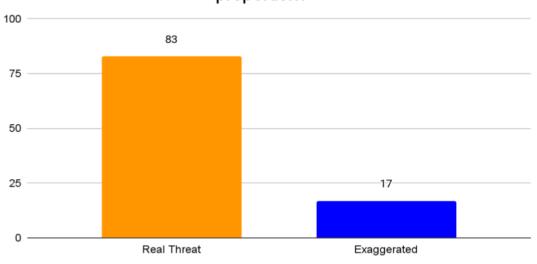
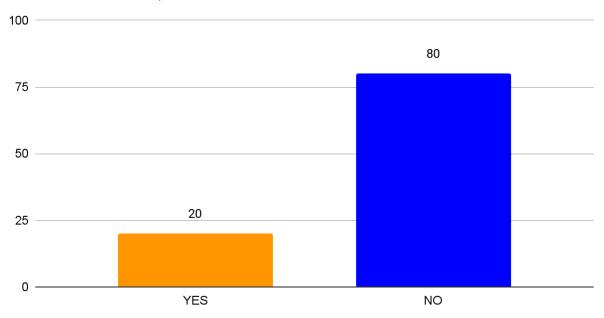


TABLE 2

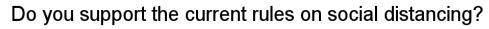
Do you think coronavirus in Orange County is completely under control, mostly under control, somewhat under control or not under control at all?



Finding #2: Government Efforts to Fight Virus Popular

We also found overwhelming support for government efforts to combat the virus, including the current rules on social distancing (90%) and a national mask mandate (70%). These prescriptions have been described as an unconstitutional infringement of civil liberties and individual freedom. Seventy-three percent (73%) said government efforts to fight the virus were either about right (38%) or did not go far enough (35%). Only about a quarter (27%) felt that government efforts to combat the virus went too far.

TABLE 3



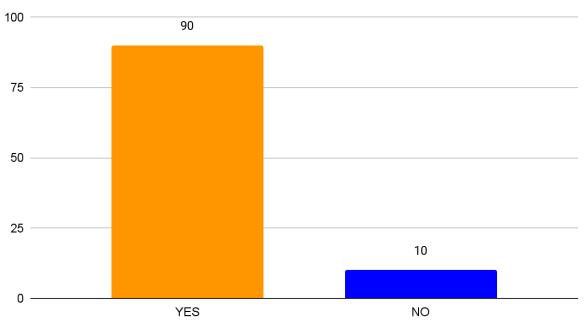
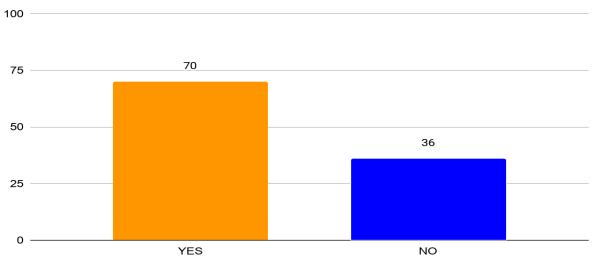


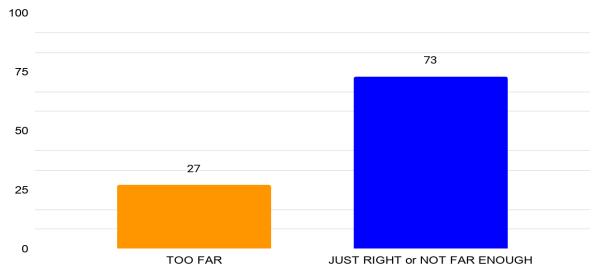
TABLE 4

Do you support a national mask mandate?



Do government mandates to fight the virus go too far?

TABLE 5



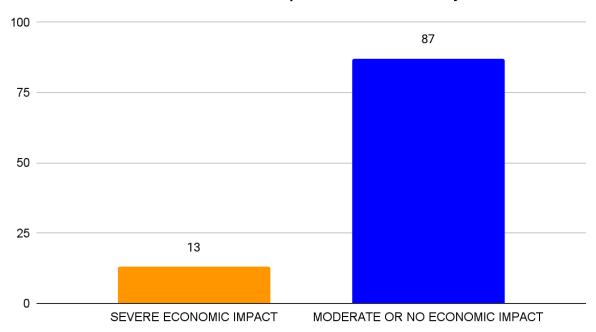
Finding #3: Economic Impact Modest For Most

While only 13 percent (13%) said the pandemic had caused them severe economic hardship, there is widespread support for an economic stimulus package, with

nearly half of those surveyed (49%) saying the plan currently being promoted by President Biden does not go far enough. Respondents also put containing the virus (64%) ahead of rebuilding the economy. Chapman University's Joel Kotkin argues that the pandemic has enlarged California's gap between the rich and poor. For example, technology companies such as California-based Zoom have been very successful during the pandemic. Orange County has a multifaceted economy. The hospitality and tourism sectors suffered greatly. However, the county is one of the state's more affluent areas and a region in which more people would have the ability to work virtually (compared to an area such as the Central Valley). Those who could work from home continued to do well.

TABLE 6

Has the coronavirus pandemic caused you:



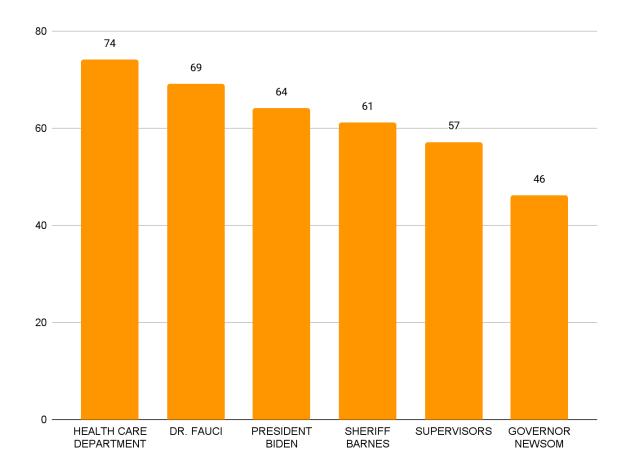
Finding #4: Residents Trust Medical Professionals More Than Politicians

As mentioned at the start of this report, health care professionals such as Drs. Nichole Quick and Clayton Chou have been personally attacked for their public health recommendations. Quick resigned in June 2020 after being threatened and intimidated as a result of her order mandating that masks be worn in public. Both have been compared to Adolf Hitler. On the national level, Dr. Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, has been harshly criticized by politicians and protestors. Nevertheless, we found that respondents have more confidence in

health professionals such as those who work for Orange County Health Care Agency (Quick and Chou) than elected officials of both parties.

TABLE 7

How much confidence do you have in the following to deal with pandemic? Percent saying "Great Deal" or "Some"

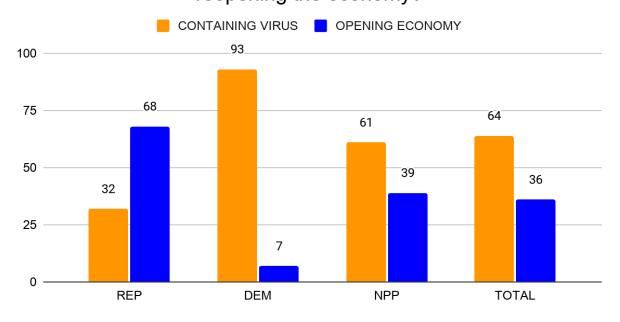


Finding #5: Partisan Divide

There was a sharp partisan divide on nearly all questions. Table 8 provides data on whether respondents felt containing the virus or reopening the economy was more important. Ninety-three percent (93%) of Democrats said that containing the virus was more important compared to 32 percent (32%) of Republicans.

TABLE 8

Which is more important to you: Containing the virus or reopening the economy?

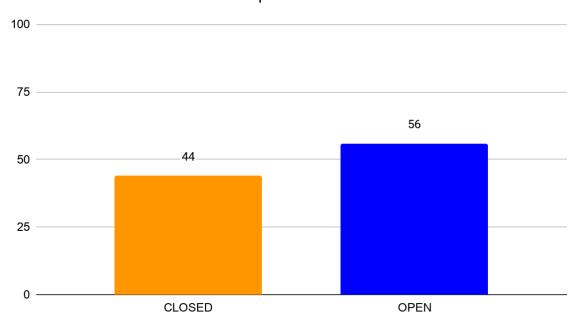


Finding #6 Agreement on Schools Reopening

The Orange County Board of Education generated nationwide headlines when it recommended in July 2020 that students return to schools with no mask or social distancing requirements. Our study found that a majority (56%) do believe schools should reopen immediately, provided proper precautions are taken. Once again, there is a major partisan divide, as 84 percent (84%) of Republicans believe this, 54 percent (54%) of Decline to State voters, and 31 percent (31%) of Democrats.

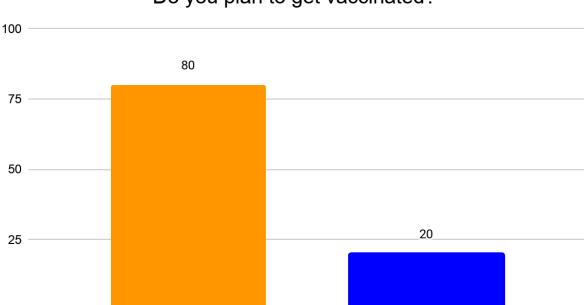
TABLE 9

Should public schools reopen immediately provided proper precautions are taken or remain closed until the threat of the coronavirus has passed?



Finding #7: Most Have or Will Get Vaccinated

Eighty percent (80%) of the respondents told us that they had been or planned to get vaccinated. The top two reasons people declined to be vaccinated was that they felt it was not safe and they thought the vaccine—which was developed at "warp" speed—needs further testing.



Do you plan to get vaccinated?

Climate Change

Seventy-nine percent (79%) said that the threat of climate change was a serious problem and 70 percent (70%) said climate change was caused by human activities. This reaffirms the finding from the 2020 Orange County Annual Survey, which focused on climate change.

NO

YES

The majority of those polled support the governor's electric car mandate. People may love their cars, but are less attached to the internal combustion engine. Respondents also accepted increased environmental regulations even if this meant higher utility bills.

Recent wildfires, which the governor and others attribute to a changing climate, appear to have had a modest impact on attitudes.

Do you support Gov. Gavin Newsom's executive order to require all new cars sold to be zero-emission vehicles by 2035?

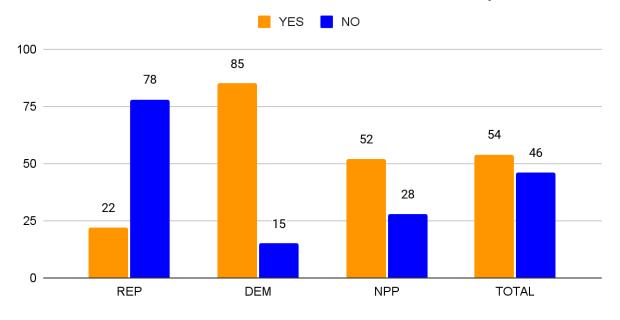
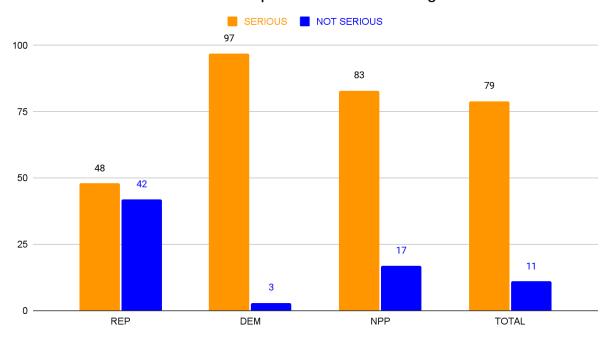


TABLE 12

How serious a problem is climate change?



Washington, D.C.

Trump is out of office but polarization remains. Sixty-nine percent (69%) believe the election fair but 31 percent (31%), a significant minority, do not. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of Republicans think the election was not conducted fairly, whereas 97 percent (97%) of the Democrats and 73 percent (73%) of the Decline to State respondents feel it was fair.

Most respondents (57%) say the Congress was right to impeach Trump for a second time. Only fifteen percent (15%) of the Republicans felt the president should have been impeached. Ninety-five percent (95%) of the Democrats and 57 percent (57%) of those who do not belong to one of the major political parties believe he should have been impeached.

People across the board say Trump will go down in history as a less-than-average president. Twenty-six percent (26%) of Republicans said he would go down as below average or as a poor president. The comparable figure for Democrats was 91 percent (91%), and Decline to State, 57 percent (57%).

Biden is popular among county residents early in his presidency. For the second consecutive presidential election since Franklin Roosevelt, the Democratic candidate won Orange County. Biden took Orange County and he remains popular here. Sixty-three percent (63%) of those surveyed said they approved of President Biden's performance in office, which is higher than his national approval rating (Gallup: 57%).

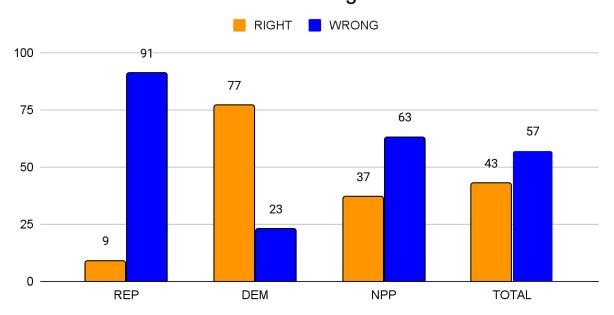
Respondents were cautiously optimistic about the direction of the country—52 percent (52%) said the U.S. is headed in the right direction, but less than half (43%) felt that California was headed in the right direction.

Sacramento

Orange County is evenly divided about removing Gavin Newsom from office before his term expires in January 2023. About half (48%) of those surveyed say the Governor should be recalled. Not surprising, support for the recall is sharply divided along party lines. Eighty percent (80%) of Republicans and the majority of the respondents who say they do not belong to either party (53%) support the recall, but 84 percent (84%) of the Democrats do not.

Do you think the State of California is headed in the right direction or the wrong direction?

TABLE 13



Governor Newsom Recall

SUPPORT OPPOSE

95

78

75

53

47

48

52

50

25

22

NPP

TOTAL

TABLE 14

Orange County

DEM

0

Each year, we ask county residents for their thoughts on the biggest problem facing people in the Orange County area today. For the fourth consecutive year (out of four consecutive years of conducting this study), housing affordability ranked first. With a rapidly increasing cost of living in the county, residents continue to be concerned with how affordable it is to live here.

REP

The coronavirus ranked second, which should be no surprise since the pandemic and ensuing lockdown affected all residents' lives during 2020. Jobs and the economy ranked third. Again, this is no surprise given the uncertainty about the region's economic future during the pandemic. This marked the first time in our four consecutive years of conducting this study that traffic did not rank in the top three. Of course, traffic was significantly lighter in 2020 once more people were required to work from home.

While there are concerns about housing affordability, OC residents like living here. When asked how they would rate the Orange County area in general as a place to live, a combined 83 percent (83%) responded with either "Excellent" or "Good." There was agreement among members of both political parties.

There is also measured optimism about living conditions and personal financial situations. When we asked whether they think the quality of living conditions in the

Orange County area will be better, worse, or about the same five to six years from now, a combined 74 percent (74%) responded with either "staying about the same" or "getting better." When we asked county residents whether they would be better off, worse off, or about the same as today three or four years from now, 88 percent (88%) responded with either "about the same" or "better off."

TABLE 15

Most Important Problems Over The Years past 2010

TOP THREE:

- 1. Housing Affordability, Homeless
- 2. Jobs, the Economy
- 3. Coronavirus

1989 UCI	1999 UCI	2010 (BU)	2019 (CU)	2020 (CU)	2021 (CU)
Traffic	Crime	Economy	Housing	Housing/ Homelessness	Housing/ Homelessness
Growth	Schools	Schools	Poverty	Traffic/ Transportation	Economy
Drug Abuse	Traffic	Immigration	Traffic	Poverty	Coronavirus

Black Lives Matter, Policing

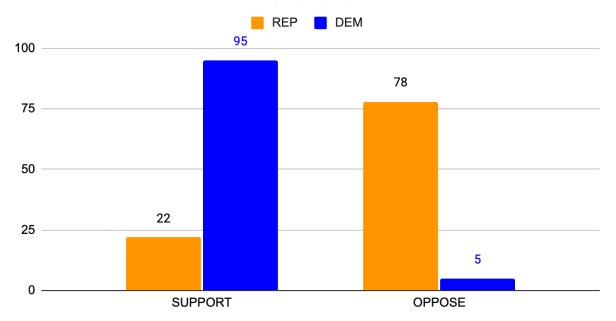
Separate from the coronavirus pandemic, last year was a significant one in terms of social justice movements. When George Floyd died on May 25, 2020, large-scale Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests erupted across the United States, including areas throughout Orange County. A national debate ensued about police brutality and funding for police. Therefore, we wanted to gain an idea of county residents' views toward both Black Lives Matter and policing in the county.

A strong majority of county residents (65%) support the Black Lives Matter movement, but there is a substantial difference between partisan affiliation. Ninety-five percent (95%) of Democrats and 73 percent (73%) of Decline to State voters support BLM, compared to only 22 percent (22%) of Republicans.

While the past year brought tension between the police and communities they serve in some major American cities, the police are generally looked upon favorably in OC. A strong majority responded with either "Excellent" or "Good" when asked about how the police were doing in maintaining public safety, treating the community with respect, responding with the appropriate number of officers, and gaining the trust of local residents. However, a majority 62 percent (62%) believe the police are doing a "Fair" or "Poor" job at responding to the mental health crisis.

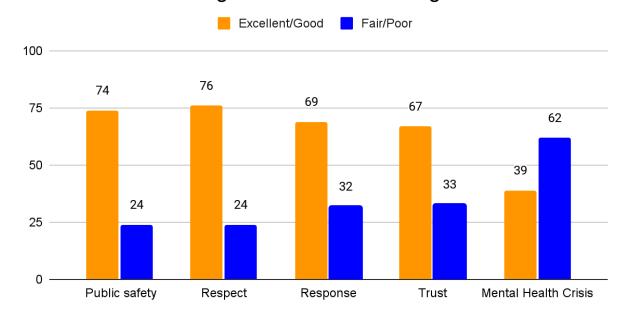
In general, Orange County, which once had a reputation for being monocultural and supportive of initiatives such as Save Our State, has evolved in its perspective on social justice issues. Meanwhile, while there is a tense relationship between police and citizens in some American metropolitan areas, that does not seem to be the case in Orange County.

In general do you support or oppose the Black Lives Matter movement?



Police In the area around where you live, how are the police doing in each of the following?

TABLE 17



Conclusions

Orange County has changed rapidly during recent years. OC is no longer an ultraconservative outlier among coastal California counties. Rather, today, it is balanced politically and is an area that resembles the rest of the United States. While political polarization stifles governing at the federal level, it also poses challenges for our local government leaders given the vast differences in opinions outlined in this report. Finding common ground and methods to create public policy that works for all OC residents will be the challenges local leaders face as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Appendix A: Methodology¹³

METHODOLOGY

Reconnaissance Market Research (ReconMR) was contracted by Chapman University to conduct telephone surveys among Orange County residents. Surveys averaged 17.57 minutes utilizing a questionnaire provided by staff at Chapman University. Respondents were screened in order to interview an adult, 18 or older, who resided in Orange County. Oversampling was introduced to target Hispanic and Asian respondents in Orange County.

Overview

The fielding period of this study was from January 26 through February 12, 2021. A total of 703 surveys were administered by ReconMR. 106 surveys were conducted among landline telephone records and 597 surveys were conducted among wireless telephone records. 488 landline records were flagged as ported wireless numbers and treated as wireless records. 14 of the surveys completed among wireless records originated from the landline frame. Both an English and Spanish language version of the questionnaire were made available. Spanish speaking households encountered by an English only interviewer were called back by a bilingual interviewer in an attempt to complete the interview in Spanish. 68 total Spanish surveys were conducted.

Telephone numbers were purchased by ReconMR through MSG (Marketing Systems Group).

Fielding

Interviews were conducted using Voxco's computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) software, which ensured all questions were asked correctly and all logic and skip patterns were implemented properly. The telephone sample was also managed by the CATI system, allowing dialing rules and disposition management to be streamlined. The CATI system allowed for a maximum of 5 attempts to be made on each number.

To ensure the highest response rate, numbers were called at various times of the day and days in the week and respondents could request a callback at a more convenient time and date as needed. These appointments were called at the appointed time or rescheduled if the respondent was not available at the initially requested time.

¹³ ReconMR contributed this appendix.

Sample and interviewer productivity were closely monitored by the project team so adjustments could be made when needed.

Sampling

A total of 11,510 unique landline telephone numbers and 43,837 unique wireless telephone numbers were required to complete the study. The final call outcome result to each telephone number is indicated in the table below.

Quality/Data Verification

Project supervisors validated 10% of each interviewer's completed surveys by calling back the respondent and verifying specific responses. Additionally, supervisors continually monitored live calls through ReconMR's call monitoring system in order to ensure proper interviewing procedures were maintained.

Appendix B: Survey Questions and Top Ends

[INSERT APPENDIX "A" OCAS 2021 Survey questions and Top Ends Here. PDF document. Please continue page numbers. 26 pages.