

Despite Great Weather, Cost of Living and Politics Drive 200,000 Out of County

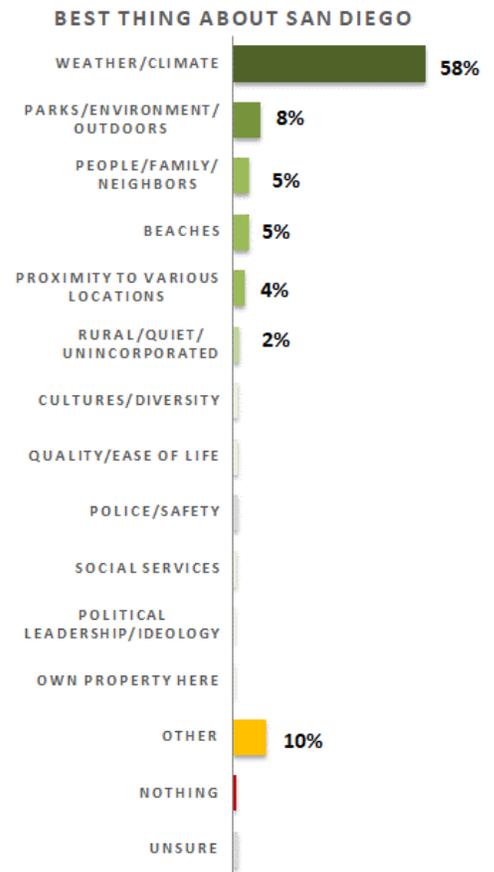
Another 600,000 are Seriously Considering Moving Away; TX, AZ, FL are Top Spots Outside CA

Dubbed “America’s Finest City” by former Mayor Pete Wilson, San Diego has been perceived as a sunny west coast paradise, a real-life version of the Southern California depicted in movies. It features year-round warm weather, beautiful beaches, and cultural institutions like the San Diego Zoo and Balboa Park. While it remains a popular tourist destination, San Diego County’s population has declined. The U.S. Census shows a decrease of 11,183 residents since July 2020, the first contraction in more than a decade. If this downward trend continues, San Diego will experience significant demographic shifts, face further political ramifications – California already lost one Congressional seat – and struggle with tax revenue in a region already burdened with high housing and living costs.

Best Thing about Living in San Diego

Residents acknowledge the climate is the best thing about living in San Diego County. With average temperatures in the low-to-mid-70s, it’s natural to find 58% putting “weather” at the tops of their list. A middle-aged female respondent remarked the “*climate makes it nice for outdoor activities all year long*” and a 50-year-old man said, “*the weather and year-round outdoor lifestyle with great dining and recreation opportunities.*” Another appreciates the weather because “*we don’t have bad storms, tornadoes, or hurricanes.*” Older non-Latinos tend to focus on the weather more often, as 82% of non-Latinos 60-plus say it’s what they like most. Whether it is the ability to maintain an outdoor lifestyle because of the mild climate year-round or not having to deal with harsh weather conditions, locals are smitten with San Diego’s temperate nature. The climate is the City’s calling card.

San Diego’s parks, environment and outdoor amenities take the second spot, though only 8% say they are the best feature. An east suburban resident likes the “*access to parks, open space, nature, and recreation.*” Another respondent lauds the “*wonderful amount of open space for outdoor recreation,*” reflecting an attitude expressed by the bulk of those focused on the outdoors. San Diego’s natural features are a much bigger plus for residents in the SDSU/La Mesa/El Cerrito neighborhoods, as well as young and middle-aged college graduates living elsewhere.



weather

Five percent proclaim the people, their family, and neighbors are what’s best about living here. At 11%, Asian Americans offer this answer more often. Many in this category cite family living close by, so presumably a lot would give the same answer regardless of where they live. Others in this group point to San Diego’s people or its culture, with a city resident remarking he likes *“the community, the people; the diversity of people and the different cultures to experience.”*

Another 5% think the beaches give San Diego its edge. *“Being close to beaches and the ocean”* and *“the beaches are really beautiful”* nicely summarize the sentiment of those focused on the coast. Coastal residents north of Del Mar are twice as likely to elevate area beaches.

Four percent like San Diego’s proximity. These residents value being near Los Angeles, the border, and the mountains as well as everyday necessities such as schools, work, and shopping. Latino women value this most, as 20% say it’s San Diego’ best attribute.

Residents cite many other minor features.

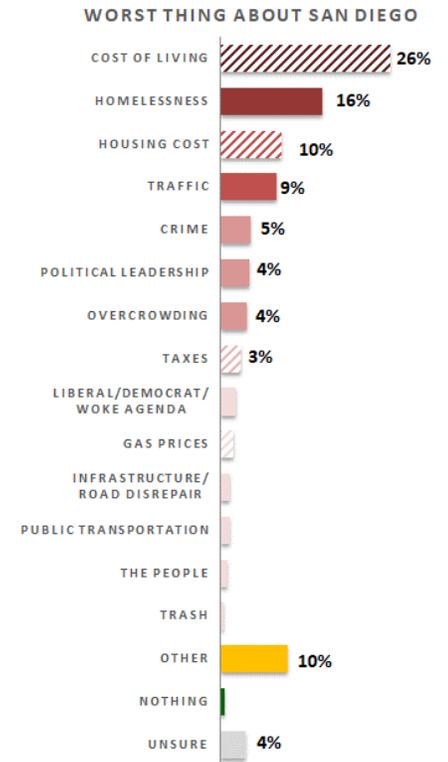
A Closer Look at San Diego’s Communities of Color

- ✓ **Opinions about San Diego’s best features among Blacks are in-line with others**
- ✓ **AAPI residents are more apt to say people/family/neighbors are what’s best**
- ✓ **The climate is less prized among Latinos, but being close to amenities is a bigger plus**

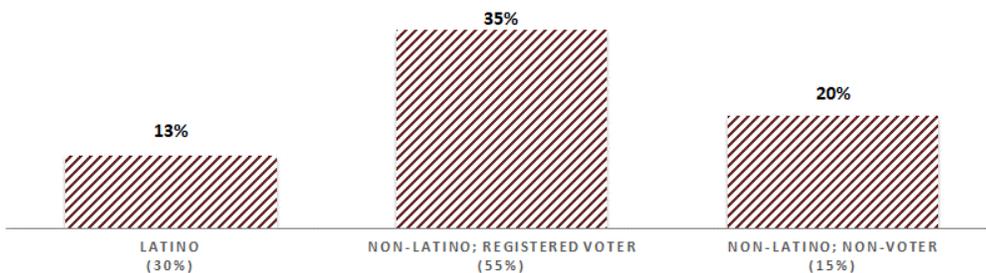
		White	Latino	Black	Asian	All
Best thing about living in San Diego	Weather/Climate	62%	44%	62%	61%	57%
	Parks/Environment/Outdoors	9%	8%	10%	7%	8%
	People/Family/Outdoors	5%	4%	4%	11%	5%
	Beaches	4%	4%	1%	6%	5%
	Proximity to various locations	0%	9%	5%	2%	3%
	Rural/Quiet/Unincorporated	3%	1%	0%	1%	2%
	Cultures/Diversity	1%	2%	0%	5%	2%
	Quality/Ease of life	0%	3%	2%	1%	1%
	Police/Safety	0%	4%	0%	2%	1%
	Social services	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%
	Political leadership/Ideology	1%	0%	0%	2%	1%
	Own property here	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%
	Other	7%	15%	12%	4%	10%
	Nothing	3%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Unsure	2%	2%	2%	0%	1%	

Worst Thing about Living in San Diego

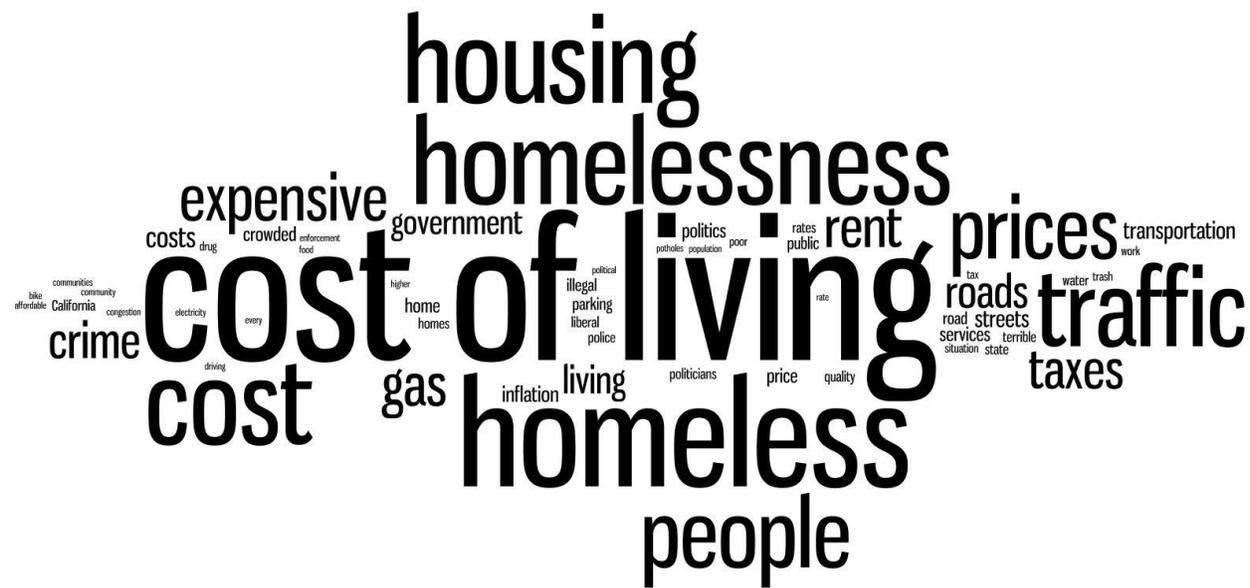
We know from last month’s installment that the cost of living is problematic. Here, 26% say it’s the worst thing about the county. Although many of these residents reference general expenses – “the cost of living in San Diego is extremely expensive and I don’t see the government stepping in and providing anything to ease the expense of living in San Diego” – others specifically call out high utility rates and gas prices. One frustrated resident complained, “the prices – I think some services are too high; the gas situation in the U.S. is higher in California than any place else.” Non-Latino voters bring up living expenses more often, so this is a potentially vote-determinative issue. Latinos – whether voters or not – are less likely to tag the cost of living as San Diego’s worst trait.



COST OF LIVING IS WORST THING BY ETHNICITY/VOTER REGISTRATION STATUS



One-in-six regard the amount of homelessness as the region’s most unpleasant aspect. Those south of SR-54 – including the communities of Chula Vista, Imperial Beach, and San Ysidro – more often say it’s San Diego’s biggest affliction. One resident tells us they see “homeless people taking over public places unchecked.” Another east suburban resident feels there is a “lack of real action to address the root causes of homelessness.” With nearly one-in-five pinpointing homelessness as the city’s biggest drawback, the problem seriously impacts San Diego’s psyche.



One-in-ten name housing costs as the worst part about San Diego. The notion that the region is now a place where only wealthy folks can afford to live is rife in this group, with one younger local lamenting *“housing isn’t affordable for the average working San Diegan.”* A highly educated resident talked about his own experience, saying, *“I want a 2 bed/ 1 bath bungalow between Hillcrest and SDSU but I’m not going to pay \$5,000 a month in rent. That is absurd!”* A north county resident was dismayed at *“not being able to afford to buy a house despite living in a two-income household with two good-paying jobs.”* The issue is politically tinged. Nonpartisans and minor party voters – especially non-Whites – frequently identify housing costs as the area’s primary downside. This suggests focusing on housing costs could be a way for either party to grow their ranks.

Traffic is the biggest pitfall for 9%. Folks in the eastern suburbs and north inland neighborhoods emphasize traffic more often, which makes sense given they likely endure longer commutes. *“The traffic, it’s getting worse; getting to and from work is horrific”* captures the feelings of this group. A woman living in the unincorporated area similarly fumed about *“the sheer amount of commute in the morning to work and going home after; the commute ends up being an hour or an hour and a half!”*

Five percent specify crime as the biggest negative. Many of these residents sense they are personally at risk of becoming a crime victim. One older woman confides she’s *“afraid of shopping due to violence”* and a south central city resident reveals, *“ten years ago when we moved here I could walk anywhere, it doesn’t feel safe anymore.”* Crime is more often singled out by Clairemont, Kearny Mesa, and Tierrasanta residents as well as east suburbanites.

Smaller shares highlight political leadership (4%), overcrowding (4%), taxes (3%), the liberal agenda (2%), gas prices (2%), infrastructure disrepair (2%), public transport (1%), the people (1%), and trash (1%).

In total, a hefty 41% point to a fiscal aspect as being the worst thing about San Diego living. Even many who named something else often brought it up as an additional drawback (e.g., *“The traffic and the cost of living is crazy,”* *“Homeless, high costs of goods and gas”*). The financial burden is undoubtedly one of the region’s key challenges to attracting newcomers and maintaining a high quality of life.

A Closer Look at San Diego’s Communities of Color

- ✓ **The Black community disproportionately focuses on housing as the worst thing**
- ✓ **Latinos are less likely to cite the cost of living as the worst thing**
- ✓ **AAPI residents are twice as likely to say crime is San Diego’s worst aspect**

		White	Latino	Black	Asian	All
Worst thing about living in San Diego	Cost of living	29%	14%	29%	36%	26%
	Homelessness	16%	17%	13%	16%	16%
	Housing cost	5%	12%	22%	16%	10%
	Traffic	9%	9%	6%	13%	9%
	Crime	5%	4%	3%	10%	5%
	Political leadership	7%	4%	1%	0%	4%
	Overcrowding	4%	3%	0%	0%	4%
	Taxes	5%	2%	1%	0%	3%
	Liberal/Democrat/Woke agenda	3%	2%	0%	0%	2%
	Gas prices	1%	5%	3%	0%	2%
	Infrastructure/Road repair	2%	1%	3%	1%	2%
	Public transportation	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%
	The people	1%	2%	2%	0%	1%
	Trash	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%
	Other	8%	14%	16%	7%	10%
	Nothing	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
	Unsure	1%	11%	0%	1%	4%

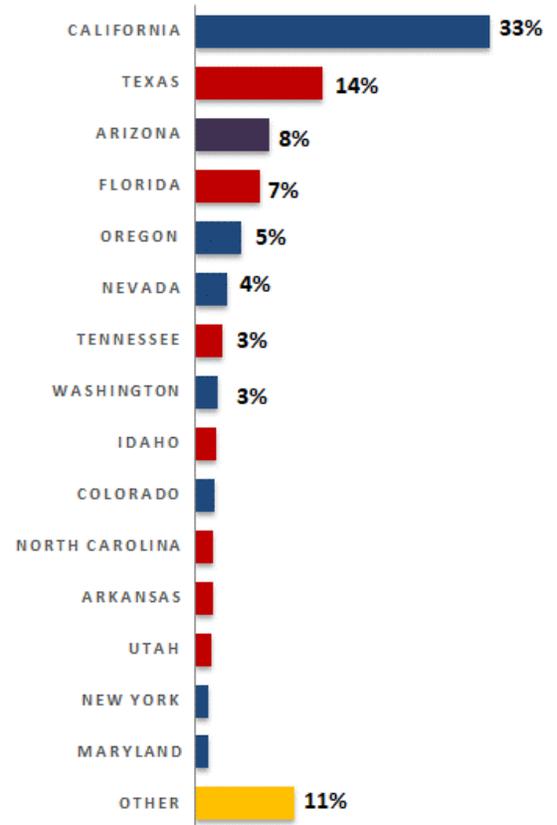
Where Might People Move To?

Asked where they would go if they were to move out of the County, two-thirds would leave the Golden State. A critic would say that's a lot of unhappy residents "voting with their feet" and they would be right because 90% of those who think the county is on the wrong track would "get the heck out" of California. It's only San Diegans who are OK with how things are going locally *and* aren't fearful of increasing costs who would mostly stay in the state.

A quarter would land in another Western state (as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau), while the South also attracts a solid 24%. The South tends to entice people for political, rather than economic reasons, appealing more to non-Democrats. Few San Diegans would consider relocating to the Midwest (3%) or Northeast (2%). Aside from relocating within California, Texas, Arizona, and Florida are the most popular destinations. Oregon, Nevada, and Tennessee are also attractive.

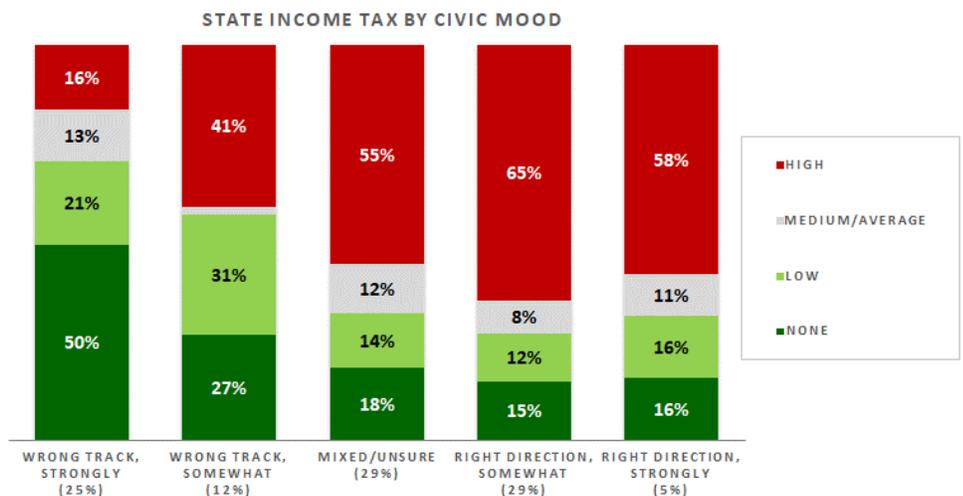
Arizona's hot and sunny climate tends to attract people who think San Diego's finest quality is the weather, and women who like the climate are attracted to the Grand Canyon State three times as often as men. Florida is another draw for sun worshippers who are dissatisfied with where San Diego is headed. Texas holds great appeal for men who are very nervous about the cost of living.

WHERE MIGHT PEOPLE MOVE TO?



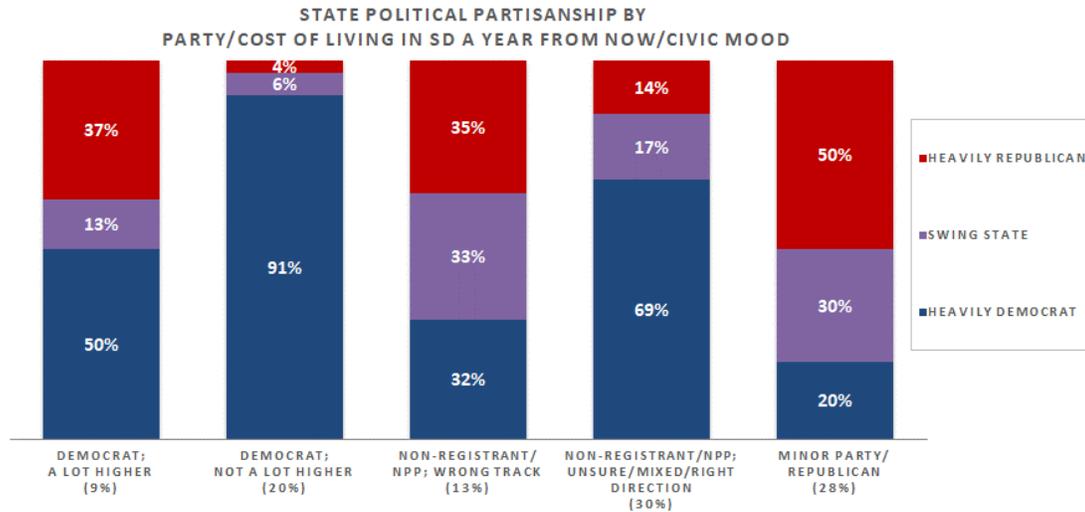
Of the 50 states, half either have *no** state income tax or a rate significantly lower** than the national average of 6.4%. When asked where they might move, 43% of San Diegans select a state with no or low income tax, while a similar share – 46% – pick a state with high tax rates (which, of course, includes California). The chart shows no-tax states tend to interest very dissatisfied residents, as half would wind up in one of those states if they could.

Most locals who feel the county is only *somewhat* on the wrong track would look outside California, but would settle for a low-tax state as often as a no-tax state. Others who aren't negative about the county's direction are generally not attracted to low-tax states.



States are often labeled "red" (Republican), "blue" (Democrat), or "purple" (so-called "swing" states). When asked where they might move, 54% name a blue state, 27% would prefer a red state like Texas, and purple states – such as Nevada and Arizona – sound attractive to another 19%.

Not surprisingly, Republicans (and minor party voters) are partial to red states. Non-partisans and non-voters gravitate somewhat to blue states, unless they think things here are on the wrong track and then it's a split decision. Democrats overwhelmingly pick blue states, but where the resident thinks costs are headed is a mediating factor. Ninety-percent of Democrats who think the cost of living won't rise a lot higher are fine with blue states, but 37% of those who think costs will increase a lot eye red states.



A Closer Look at San Diego's Communities of Color

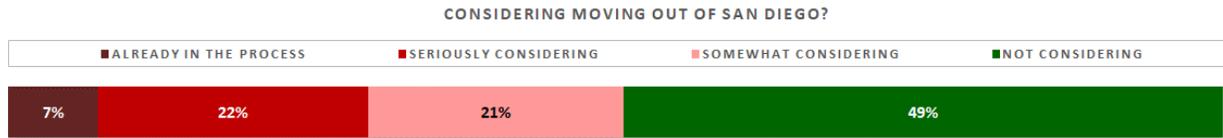
- ✓ Blacks would more often relocate to Texas
- ✓ The AAPI community leans towards "blue" states, including California
- ✓ Relocation choices among the Latino community align with those of the population at-large

		White	Latino	Black	Asian	All
Where might people move to?	California	30%	39%	28%	46%	33%
	Texas	5%	11%	23%	11%	8%
	Arizona	9%	8%	0%	3%	7%
	Florida	6%	2%	2%	5%	5%
	Oregon	2%	4%	8%	3%	4%
	Other	34%	24%	24%	20%	29%
	Unsure	14%	11%	15%	12%	14%

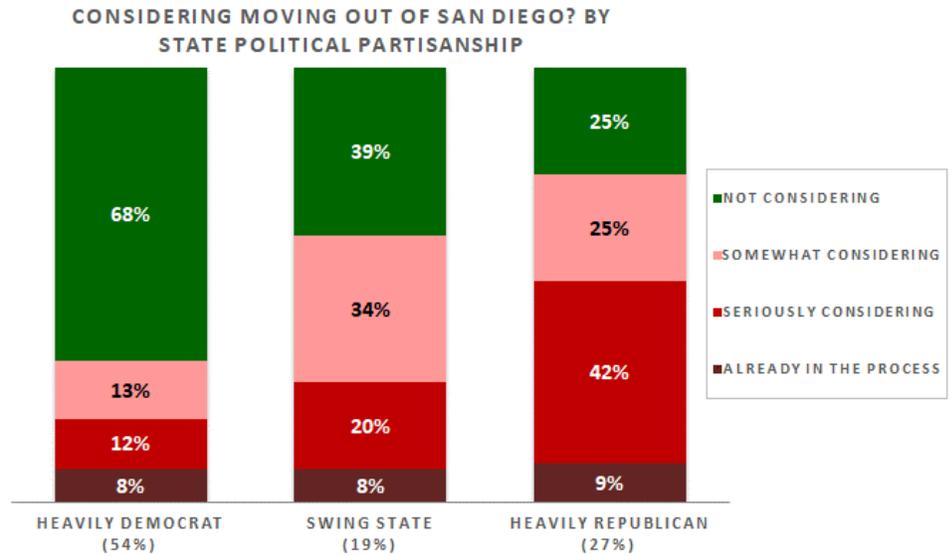
Moving Out of San Diego County?

Eight percent of San Diegans are already in the process of exiting the county. In raw numbers, that means roughly 200,000 are leaving. Another 22% are seriously considering moving out. If all those seriously contemplating a move acted on that impulse, San Diego would drop about 600,000 more residents! Although these numbers don't account for people moving to San Diego or births, such a

massive population loss would spell trouble for the region. Another 21% are toying with the idea of moving, while only half are definitely staying put.

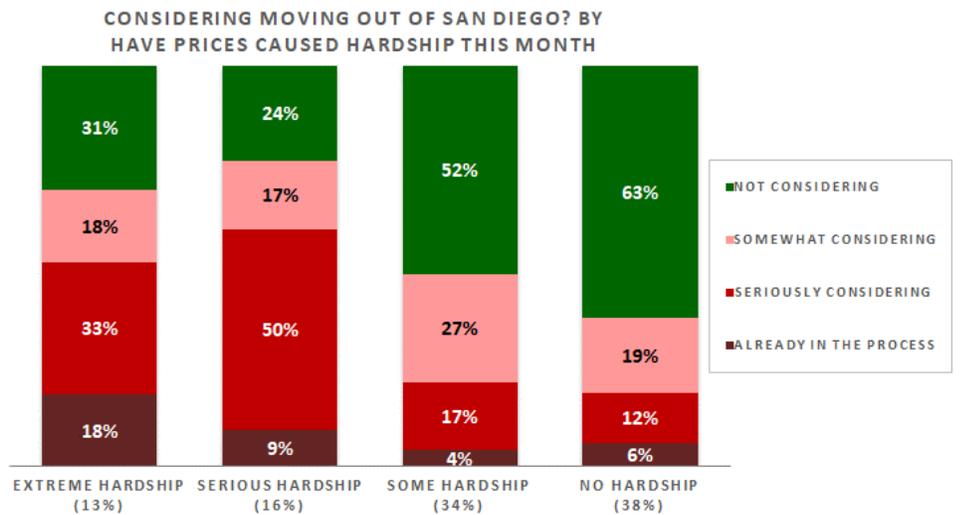


The “pull” versus “push” issue is interesting. Some types of states – based mainly on their political make up, but also on their tax policy -- are pulling many San Diegans to them. A slim majority of residents who think a red state is enticing are either *seriously* considering moving or are already in the process! The red state tug is very real and one reason why the local Republican electorate is withering.



Conversely, two-thirds who move to a blue state (heavily Democrat) are not thinking about leaving San Diego. Purple states exert a moderate amount of pull.

But there are local “push” factors at play. The rising cost of living sticks in the craw of some residents so much that it significantly boosts their desire to leave. Half those facing extreme hardship in paying for the necessities are seriously considering a move and 18% are already packing their bags.



Traffic evidently gets under people’s skin so much that, if they perceive it to be the worst thing about San Diego, they are very likely to consider moving out and 14% are already acting on that.

In some good news, at least for the City of Chula Vista, the survey shows residents there are substantially less likely to bail out of the county. Sixty percent are not thinking about moving and only 2% are in the process of leaving.

Smaller shares are staying because they are retired/too old to move (6%) or like the weather (3%).

A Closer Look at San Diego’s Communities of Color

- ✓ African Americans less often say they’re staying because they love it here
- ✓ Latinos are staying because of their deep roots much more often
- ✓ Asian residents who won’t move often say it’s because they love San Diego or have friends and family nearby, but seldom say it’s because they’re natives

		White	Latino	Black	Asian	All
Main reason not considering moving	This is home/Native	19%	33%	21%	7%	25%
	Like/Love it here	21%	14%	6%	28%	18%
	Family/Friends	14%	10%	34%	29%	15%
	Own a home/property here	8%	13%	14%	12%	10%
	Job/Work	10%	6%	6%	15%	9%
	Retired/Too old to move	10%	3%	2%	0%	6%
	Confused	3%	7%	0%	0%	4%
	Weather/Climate	3%	1%	0%	6%	3%
	Not considering moving	2%	4%	4%	0%	2%
	Recently moved here	4%	0%	0%	2%	2%
	Other	4%	5%	16%	0%	4%
	Nothing/Don’t know	2%	4%	0%	2%	2%

Findings are based on the results from our scientific poll of 504 San Diego County adult residents. The poll was conducted in English and Spanish by Competitive Edge Research & Communication (CERC), a national research firm based in San Diego, from December 1 through 6, 2022. The maximum margin of sampling error for the total sample is +/- 4.4%. The margin of sampling error for subgroups is larger. Interviews were conducted by trained professionals at CERC’s El Paso, TX, facility, and via the web for residents with an e-mail address or cell phone number in the sample.

**States with no state income tax: Alaska, Florida, Nevada, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, Wyoming*

**States with lower-than-average state income tax rates: Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Utah*