

UCI-OC POLL

BRAIN DRAIN IN ORANGE COUNTY?

August, 2024



UCI School of Social Ecology
ALL IN FOR ALL

UCI-OC POLL

Brain Drain in Orange County?

Between now and 2060, Orange County's working-age population is projected to grow by just 2 percent, even as the needs for a trained workforce increase. Orange County's business leaders regularly express concern about retaining skilled employees, just as community members are concerned that long-term residents may be departing to other states and communities, taking their considerable experience and built-up wealth with them.

How realistic are these fears? Is Orange County experiencing a "brain drain," and if so, what is driving residents to leave? Most importantly, what steps can be taken to attract and retain residents and skilled employees?

As part of the UCI-OC Poll, the University of California, Irvine's School of Social Ecology recently surveyed more than 800 residents about their satisfaction with life in OC, their potential thoughts of leaving, and the factors that could hold them or drive them away. This larger survey was followed-up by interviews with 100 individuals who recently moved to Orange County and 200 former residents who have relocated. Together, these data provide a fuller accounting of the risks facing Orange County and the factors that motivate staying and leaving. With a comprehensive picture, OC leaders are better equipped to respond.

The Takeaways

- **A Relatively Stable Population.** Although California has consistently lost residents to other states over the last quarter century, Orange County has seen changes at the margins. Over the last four years, the County has lost approximately 1 percent of its population. [Slides 2-3]
- **Residents Are Generally Satisfied With Life In Orange County.** Orange County remains a popular place to live. A plurality of residents is optimistic about the County's future, and more than 4 in 5 residents are satisfied with the quality of life here. This is in stark contrast to the nearly two-thirds of residents who believe the nation is on the wrong track. [Slides 4-6]
- **However, There Is Danger Lurking Around The Corner: Half Of Residents Have Or Are Considering Relocation, And "Leavers" Are Disproportionately Concentrated.** More than one-third of residents are actively considering a move away from Orange County, and another significant segment has considered the possibility over the last four years. In total, 51% of OC residents are "potential leavers." These numbers are most concentrated among residents under 40, women, non-white residents, and those without a college education. [Slides 7-8]

- **The Primary Reasons Are Cost Of Housing And Cost Of Living.** Potential leavers cite two predominant reasons for their potential departure – the cost of housing (named by 78% as very important) and the cost of living (cited by 76% as very important). Taxes are a distant third (named by 51% as very important), although it and four other factors (crime, traffic, job market, and political environment) are cited by a majority of potential leavers as either very or somewhat important to their decision. [Slide 9]
- **The Predominant Factors Vary By Particular Demographics.** Although all potential leavers agree on the predominant concerns, those under 55 and non-white residents are much more likely to name the job market as a significant concern. By contrast, those 65 and older are more likely to cite the political climate as a reason for their potential departure from OC. [Slides 10–12]
- **Those Who Leave Stay Primarily In California.** Contrary to popular legend, two-thirds of OC residents who have relocated actually stay in California. Just 4% of leavers have moved, respectively, to Texas or Arizona. [Slides 13–14]
- **Similarly, Orange County Attracts Most Of Its New Arrivals From Within California.** Among those who recently moved to Orange County, 81% came from within California. The largest area of origin was Los Angeles County, the prior home to 29% of new residents. [Slide 15]
- **Even New Arrivals Agree That The Cost Of Housing Is A Serious Problem.** New arrivals rate Orange County higher than their prior locale on many indicia. However, like those who have left the County, seven in 10 identify the cost of housing as a serious problem. [Slides 16 and 17]
- **Orange County Has Multiple Draws.** OC residents are drawn to the area by four predominant reasons: They appreciate the quality of life and good weather; they have friends and family in the area; and they value access to high quality health care. Indeed, even those who have left acknowledge the County's high quality of life. [Slides 18 and 19]
- **The Predominant Factors for Staying Vary by Particular Demographics.** Although many residents cite the presence of family and friends as an important reason for staying, it is most significant for those under 30 or 55 and older. By contrast, the County's diversity is cited most positively by those under 40. The County's schools are much more important to Latino and Asian residents than those who are White. [Slides 20–22]
- **Ultimately, This is a Straightforward Story: The High Costs of Housing and Living Drive Some Residents Away to Other Parts of California.** Orange County is an attractive place to live. Current residents, new arrivals, and even those who have left appreciate its high quality of life. That said, the quality of life is not enough to hold some residents, nor is it the predominant reason that people move here. New arrivals come for jobs, to be closer to family, and for educational opportunities. They, like the rest of the population, are concerned about the high cost of housing. Residents typically do not want to move, but the lack of affordable housing and the high cost of living (groceries, gas, etc.), drive some residents away to other, less expensive parts of California. [Slide 23]

The School of Social Ecology conducted this poll in collaboration with Dr. Ken Goldstein and his team at the American Association of Universities.

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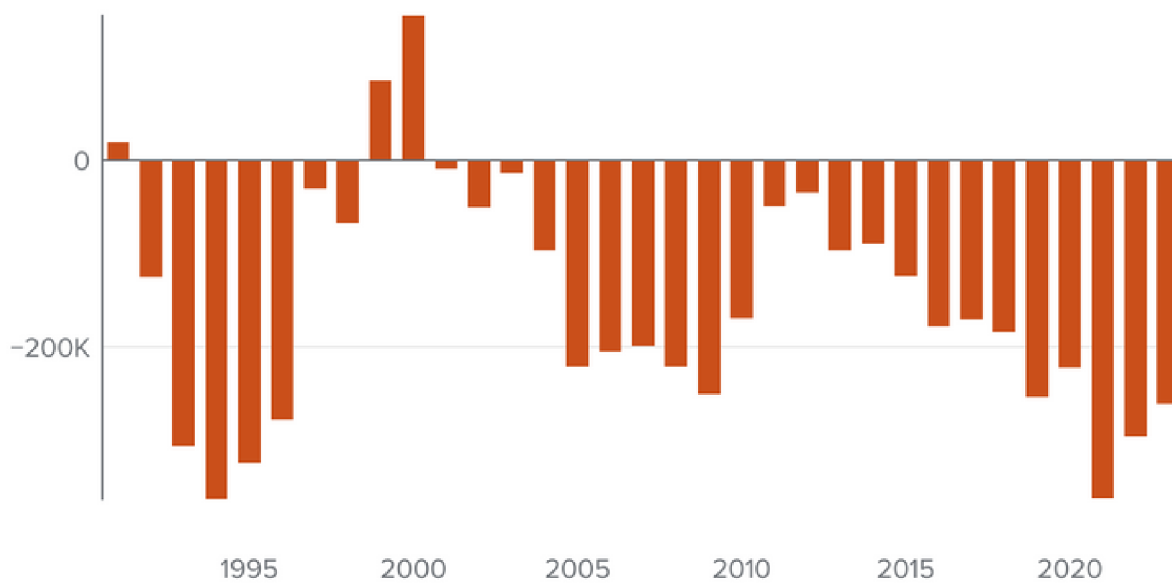
ORANGE COUNTY HISPANIC CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Brain Drain in Orange County?

School of Social Ecology
University of California, Irvine
August 9, 2024

California has been losing residents to other states for more than two decades

Net interstate migration



SOURCE: PPIC based on California Department of Finance estimates.

NOTES: Net flows are from July 1 of previous year to June 30 of current year.

FROM: PPIC Blog, February 2024.

Orange County Population 2020-2024

	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
Population	3,150,835	3,141,065	3,151,071	3,172,352	3,186,989
% Change	0.3%	(0.3%)	(0.6%)	(0.4%)	---

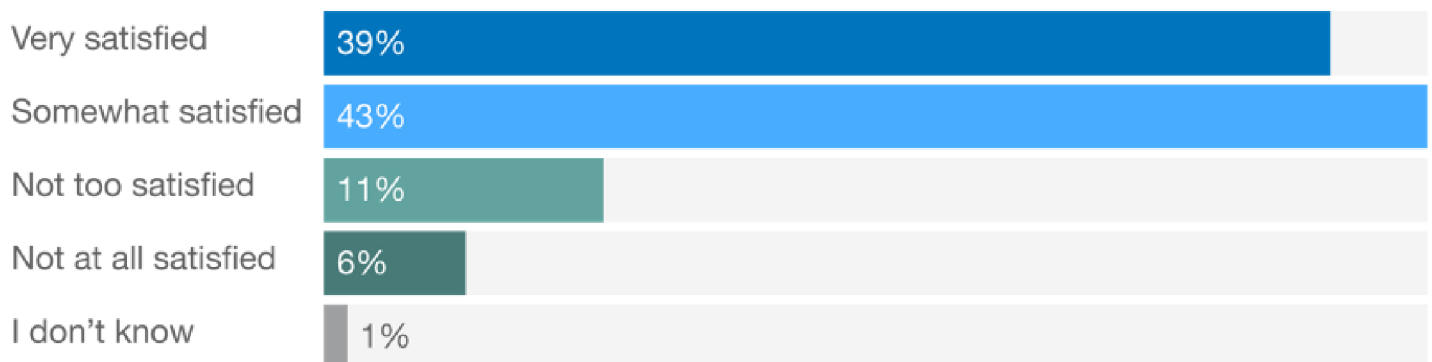
Direction of Orange County

Q. Now thinking just about Orange County, do you think things in Orange County are generally on the right track or off on the wrong track?



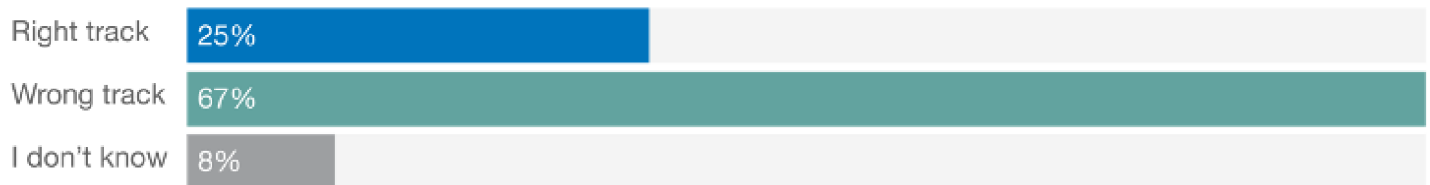
Satisfaction with Orange County

Q. Moving on to something else... How satisfied are you with living in Orange County?



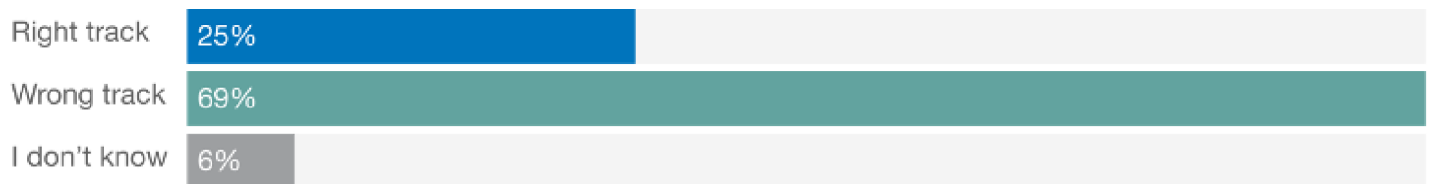
Direction of the Country

Q. Thinking about the country as a whole, do you think things in the United States are generally on the right track or off on the wrong track?



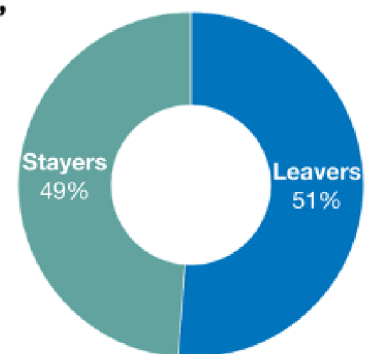
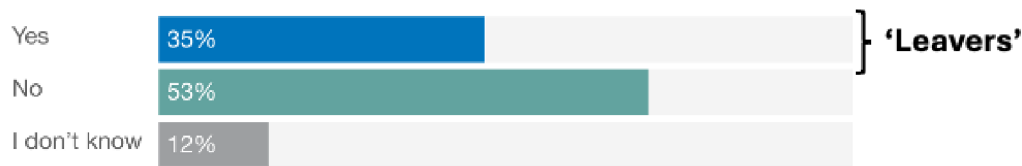
AAU National Study

Q. Thinking about the country as a whole, do you think things in the United States are generally on the right track or off on the wrong track?



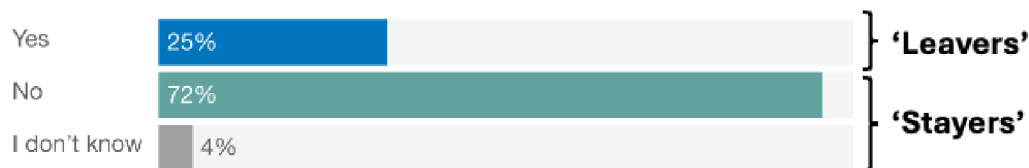
Orange County ‘Leavers’ and ‘Stayers’

Q. Are you currently considering the possibility of moving away from Orange County in the near future?



Among those who said “No” or “I don’t know”...

Q. In the last four years, have you ever considered the possibility of moving away from Orange County?



Groups Most Likely to Be “Leavers”

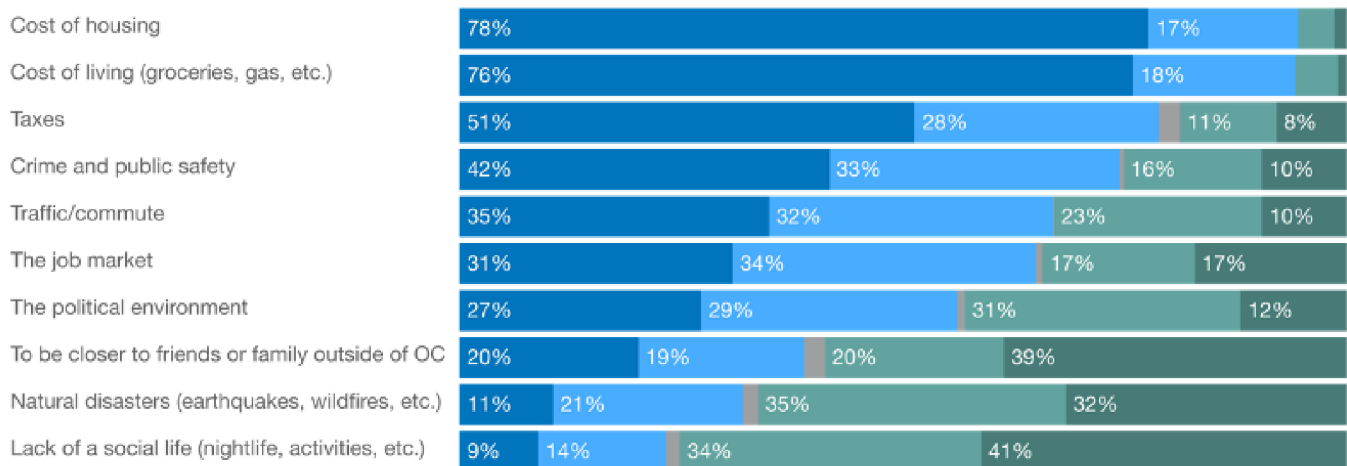
- Younger than 40 (47% considering a move)
- Women (40%)
- Non-white Residents (40%)
- Non-college Educated Residents (40%)

Reasons for Leaving Orange County

Among those who've considered leaving Orange County...

Q. How important have each of the following reasons been to why you have considered moving away from Orange County?

Very important Somewhat important Not too important Not important at all I don't know



Job Market as Important Factor for Potential Leavers (by Age)

% Important	18-29	30-39	40-54	55-64	65+
Very	44	33	34	24	1
Somewhat	41	36	41	24	15
Total	85	69	75	48	16

Job Market as Important Factor for Potential Leavers (by Race)

% Important	White	Latino	Asian
Very	22	42	25
Somewhat	23	37	47
Total	45	79	72

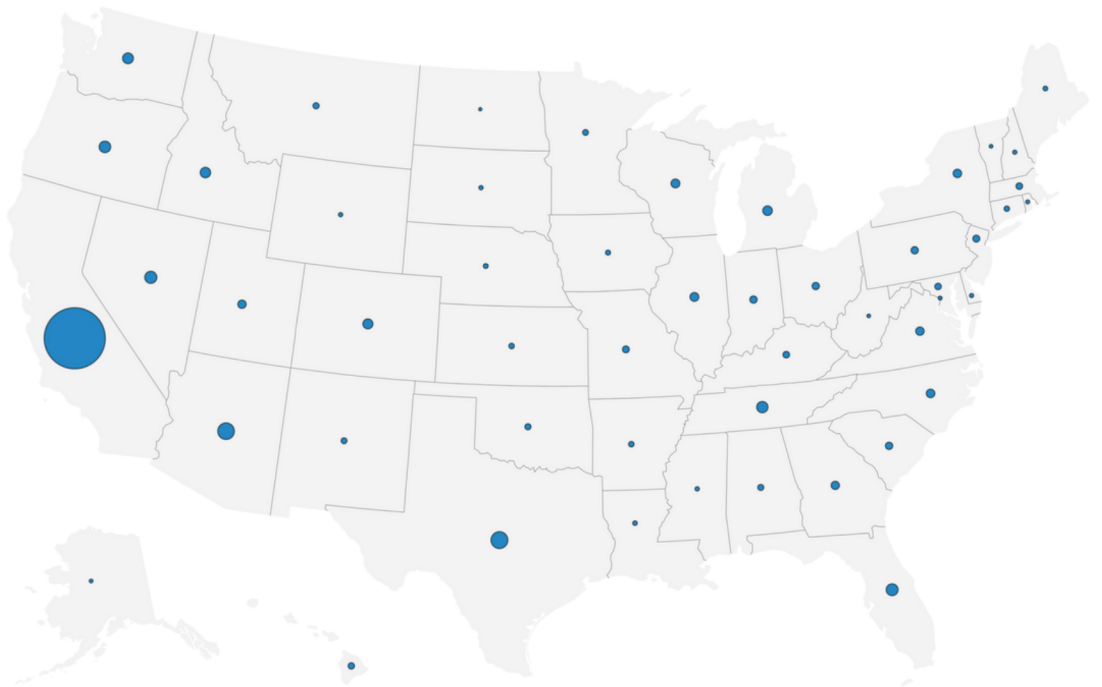
Politics as Important Factor for Potential Leavers (by Age)

% Important	18-29	30-39	40-54	55-64	65+
Very	27	17	26	34	45
Somewhat	27	31	32	26	26
Total	54	48	58	60	71

Where “Leavers” Moved To

Top 5

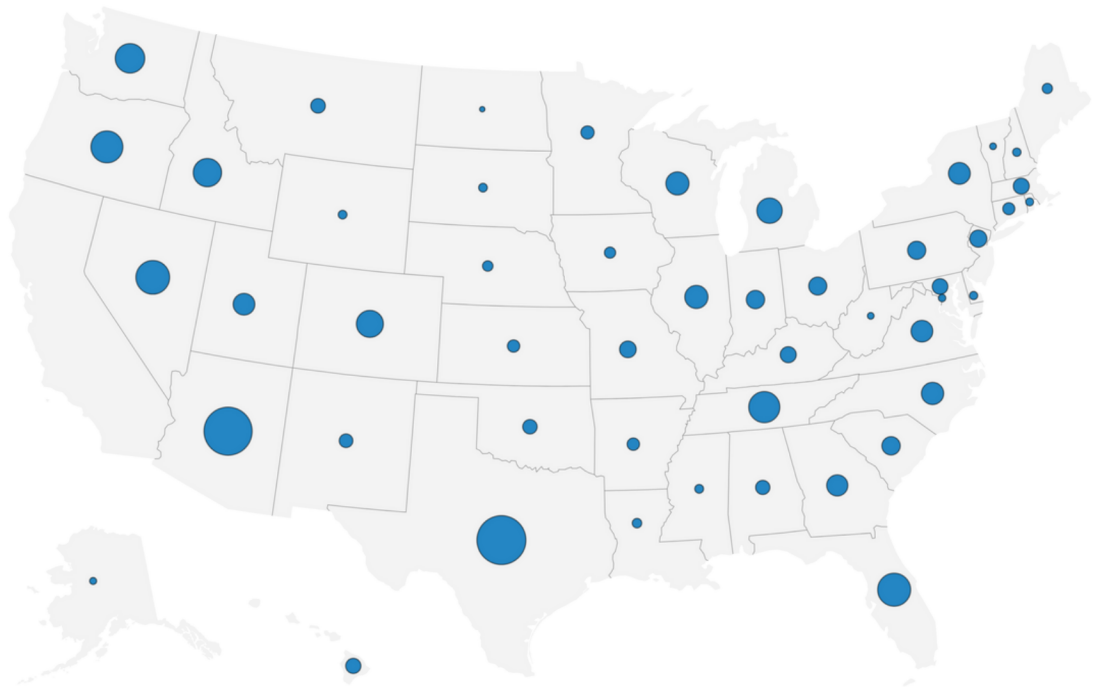
1. California (68%)
2. Texas (4%)
3. Arizona (4%)
4. Nevada (2%)
5. Florida (2%)



Top States “Leavers” Moved To

Top 5 (excl. CA)

1. Texas (13%)
2. Arizona (12%)
3. Nevada (6%)
4. Florida (6%)
5. Oregon (5%)



OC's New Arrivals

- Los Angeles County: 29%
- Elsewhere in California: 52%
- Out of State: 19%

Serious Problems in OC vs. Prior Community New Arrivals

Serious Problem	Orange County	Old Community
Lack of Affordable Housing	71%	52%
Traffic	36%	47%
Homelessness	32%	54%
Poor Local Leadership	31%	42%
Taxes	44%	35%
Overdevelopment	14%	15%
Crime	14%	44%

Serious Problems in Orange County Actual Leavers vs. Arrivals

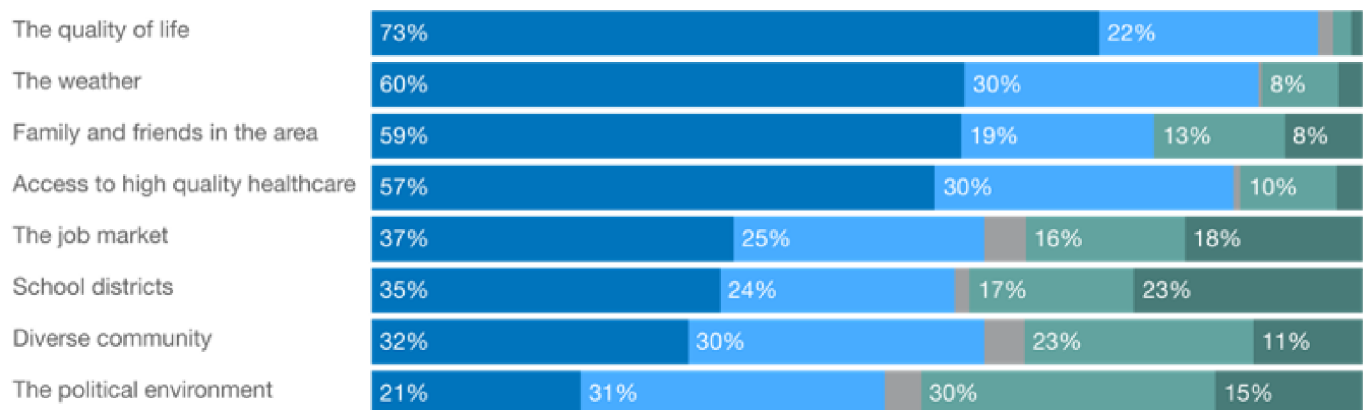
Serious Problem in OC	California Leavers	Out of State Leavers	Arrivals
Affordable Housing	72%	72%	71%
Traffic	58%	67%	36%
Homelessness	49%	68%	32%
Poor Local Leadership	40%	34%	31%
Taxes	39%	66%	44%
Overdevelopment	33%	40%	14%
Crime	19%	35%	14%

Reasons for Staying in Orange County

Among those who haven't considered leaving Orange County...

Q. How important have each of the following reasons been to why you have not considered moving away from Orange County?

■ Very important
 ■ Somewhat important
 ■ Not too important
 ■ Not important at all
 ■ I don't know



Quality of Life in Orange County Actual Leavers vs. Arrivals

Quality of Life	California Leavers	Out of State Leavers	Arrivals
Life in OC is Excellent	31%	22%	42%
Life in OC is Good	53%	56%	48%

Family in Area as Important Factor for Staying (by Age)

% Important	18-29	30-39	40-54	55-64	65+
Very	69	41	48	76	63
Somewhat	10	21	30	8	21
Total	79	62	78	84	84

Diversity as Important Factor For Staying (by Age)

% Important	18-29	30-39	40-54	55-64	65+
Very	43	38	29	33	27
Somewhat	32	35	28	28	30
Total	75	73	57	61	57

Schools as Important Factor For Staying (by Race)

% Important	White	Latino	Asian
Very	32	46	30
Somewhat	14	21	41
Total	46	67	71

A Straightforward Story

- Everyone Appreciates OC's High Quality of Life but is Concerned about the Cost of Housing
- Leavers Move Elsewhere in California For:
 - Affordable Housing
 - Lower Cost of Living
- Arrivals Came For:
 - Jobs
 - Family
 - Educational Opportunities

Methodology

The Brain Drain Report is based on four studies fielded in 2024 with the assistance of the Association of American Universities.

Orange County Study:

- Fielded March 20-27, 2024
- N = 804 Orange County adults
- Blended methodology, calibrating sample from an online non-probability panel provided by Dynata Research with a probability phone sample from the Orange County voter file
- Sample was weighted to Census Bureau data for gender, age, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment. Calibrations to party identification and voter registration were also implemented.
- Margin of error = 3%.

Orange County In-State “Leavers” Study:

- Fielded May 2-4, 2024
- N = 108 adults who moved to another part of California in the last four years

Orange County Out-of-State “Leavers” Study:

- Fielded July 31-August 1, 2024
- N = 82 adults who moved to another state in the last four years

Orange County “Arrivals” Study:

- Fielded May 2-7, 2024
- N = 100 adults moved to Orange County, California in the last four years

Respondents in the “leavers” and “arrivals” studies were identified via the voter file, contacted by text message, and interviewed online.



To learn more about the
UCI-OC Poll, visit the website:

sites.uci.edu/ocpoll

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