



Public Opinion on Wildfire Policies in California

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Wildfire season is upon us. As in previous years, wildfires caused over 100,000 people to flee and spread smoke over large areas of the state. This year, PG&E pre-emptively took steps to limit its liability for damages caused by downed power lines by shutting off electricity for many people in Northern California and the Bay Area.

In an effort to understand what the public supports with respect to wildfire policy, the Bill Lane Center for the American West at Stanford University has conducted an American western regional poll that includes 3,000 respondents and asked many questions about wildfire policies. Among the sample, 1,046 reside in California. The survey was fielded between August 25 and September 6, 2019.

California has been on the forefront of efforts to limit greenhouse gas emissions but the wildfires remind Californians that the state will also need to adapt in various ways in order to be resilient to climate changes that have already started.

Our public opinion survey reveals the following for our California sample:

- As of the time of the time of the poll (Aug15-Sept 6, 2019), 25% of Californian surveyed reported that they or someone they knew had experienced a wildfire event personally in the past 12 months.

The Bill Lane Center for the American West

The Jerry Yang & Akiko Yamazaki Environment & Energy Building

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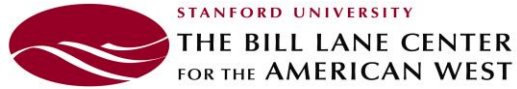
- Even more said they had been exposed to wildfire smoke. About 52% said they experienced smoke from wildfires in the past 12 months. This is nearly identical to the numbers exposed to smoke in the coastal states (California, Oregon and Washington) and interior Western states (Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Utah, Idaho, Nevada).
- Of those who were exposed to the smoke, about half of Californians claimed to have taken some precautionary measures. For the vast majority of those who were exposed to smoke, this meant paying attention to the Air Quality Reports (79%) or staying indoors (83%).
- Far fewer wore a respirator N95/P100 (28%), wore a dusk/paper/or cloth mask (35%) used an air purifier (30%), left town (18%) or consulted a healthcare provider (9%)

In terms of policies that would reduce either the hazards of and exposure to wildfires, we found:

- A majority of Californians favor requiring property owners to undertake prescriptive burns and other fuel reduction measures (55%).
- A majority also favor restricting residential (62%) and commercial (60%) in areas that could potentially be affected by wildfires.
- However, there is far less than majority support for requiring property owners to buy wildfire insurance (36%) or mandating relocation out of wildfire prone areas (28%) or even prohibiting owners from rebuilding in those same locations after losing property in a wildfire event (22%)

In terms of using public money to subsidize protective measures related to wildfires:

- While no measure reaches majority support, Californians are most open to subsidizing home upgrades (48%) and insurance (41%).
- However, when these measures are targeted to low income individuals, public for home upgrade and insurance subsidies rises to over 50%
- Support for subsidizing protective upgrades and insurance for commercial properties drops to about a third of the respondents.
- There is little support for subsidizing retreat and relocation or buyouts for either home or commercial properties, even for low income individuals.



In short, there is still resistance to doing much more than requiring property owners to take steps to better protect their properties and some restrictions in development in wildfire prone areas. Respondents are also reluctant to force or spend money to induce property owners to move out of harms' way.

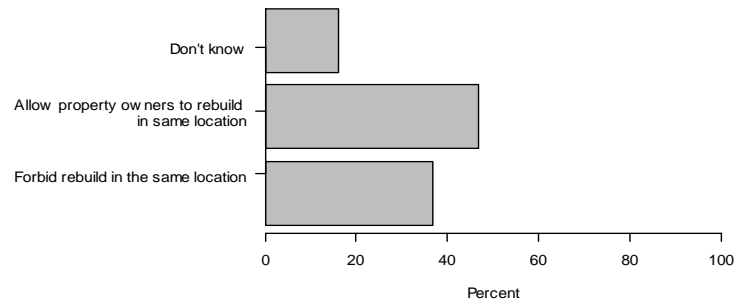
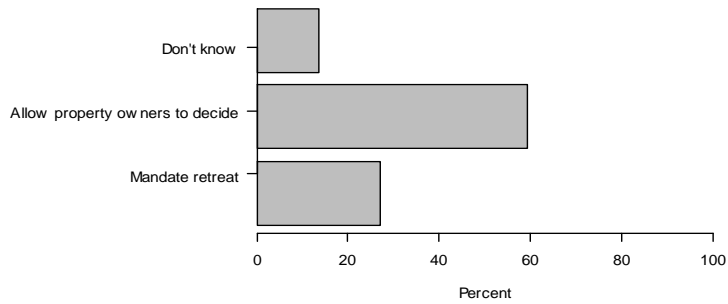
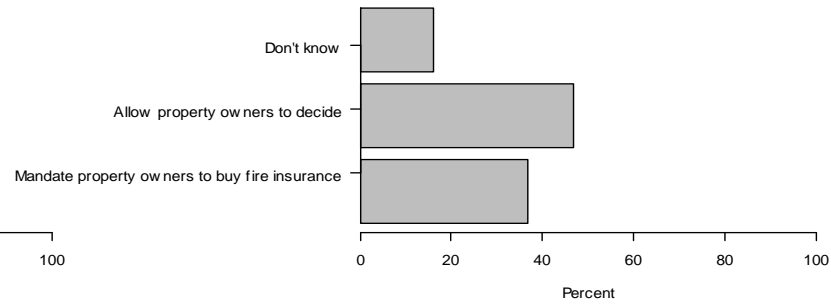
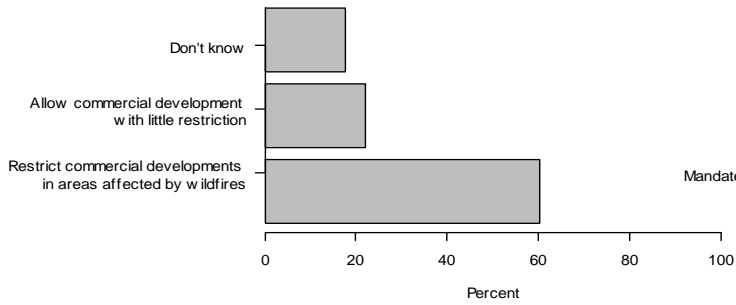
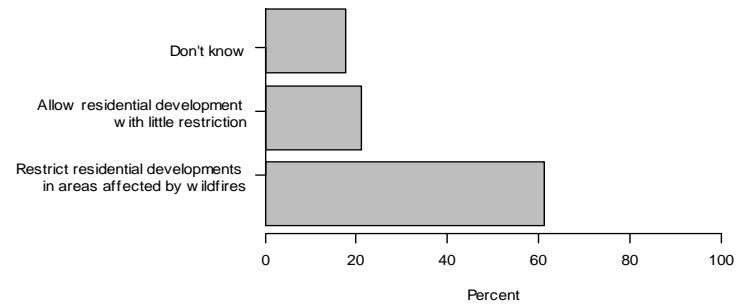
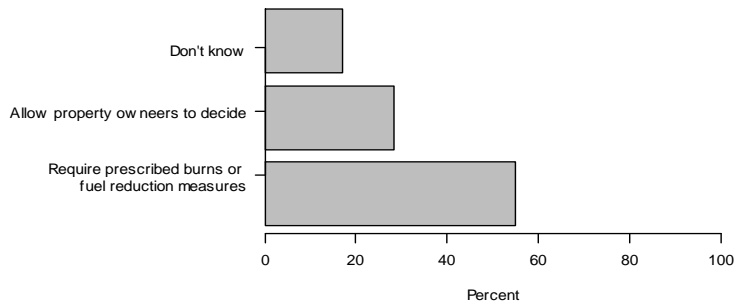
	California Sample
% Reported wildfire happened in the state in past 12 months	55%
% Experienced wildfire personally in past 12 months	13%
% Knew someone who experienced wildfire in past 12 months	18%
% Experienced wildfire smoke in past 12 months	52%

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Which of the following government policies come closest to your view, even if neither is exactly right?



Do you agree or disagree that the government should use public funds in affected areas to do the following to protect against potential wildfire damages?

