

## Islanders perceive homelessness worsening - Hawaii News - Honolulu Star-Advertiser

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### Islanders perceive homelessness worsening

By Timothy Hurley

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A majority of Hawaii residents think the homeless problem has grown worse over the last year and even threatens the state's economy by discouraging visitors from returning.

In addition, most folks who responded to the Hawaii Poll say the homeless are reducing the quality of their own lives by their increasing presence on or near beaches, parks, sidewalks and other places where they hang out.

However, most people say that it isn't such a big problem that it can't be solved, according to the poll.

Denise Mazzanti of Hawaii Kai said the problem is huge and only growing larger, but while there are solutions, it just doesn't seem the electorate and the politicians are making wise choices.

"It's a sin," Mazzanti said. "Our government can throw billions at a wasteful rail system, but it cannot put up affordable housing."

Some 55 percent of the 642 likely voters queried by Ward Research Inc. of Hono-lulu said homelessness has worsened over the last 12 months, while 38 percent said the problem is about the same. Only 4 percent answered that the homeless problem was better. The margin of error was 3.9 percent.

Not quite as many neighbor islanders thought the problem had worsened — 45 percent — with 40 percent saying it is about the same. Only 9 percent said the problem is getting better.

According to last year's one-night count of Hawaii's homeless, the number of Oahu's unsheltered climbed to 1,465 from 1,318, a roughly 11 percent increase over the year before. Overall, federal officials say the number of homeless people in Hawaii is up 8.6 percent since 2010 to more than 6,000.

Rodolfo Dolartre said he doesn't have to look far from his Kapa-hulu Avenue residence to see the proliferation of homeless. Last year only two or three people would hang out at the spacious bus stop with

a roof at Kapa-hulu and Kala-kaua avenues. Now, he said, there are usually five to seven homeless folks there.

"It's doubled most every place," said Dolartre, a contractor who works at Pearl Harbor.

When asked whether homelessness is affecting Hawaii's economy by discouraging visitors from returning to the islands, 54 percent responded affirmatively while 40 percent said they didn't think so.

Mazzanti said she shakes her head when she reads letters to the editor from Canadians who say they've been coming here for years but are not coming back because Wai-kiki is inundated with the homeless.

"Our economy is based on tourism, and if we allow it to go unchecked, what are we going to become?" she said.

Sharon Price, owner of a bed-and-breakfast in Kai-lua, said 50 percent to 60 percent of her guests bring up the homeless problem without her asking about it.

"They find it uncomfortable," she said, "but not a single guest has told me they wouldn't come back."

Some 58 percent responded that homelessness erodes the quality of their lives by their presence on such places as sidewalks, parks and beaches, while 39 percent disagreed.

And 54 percent responded no to this question: "Do you believe that the homeless problem in Hawaii is such a big problem that it will never be resolved?" Forty-two percent answered yes.

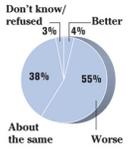
"Honestly, the government is doing a lot with homeless shelters and building more affordable housing," said Allen Vinta, a teacher from Mili-lani. "But I know they are not doing enough. I know it's not a problem they can solve easily. And even though they are doing a lot, I don't think they are doing all they can. But I don't really know what they can do."

Vinta said a troubling development is that there seems to be more young people who are homeless, and they seem to expect the government to take care of them.

He said a sputtering economy is helping to drive the homeless problem. But it's that same economy, he said, that can make it hard for the middle class to lend a helping hand, because they are having a hard time getting by, too.

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During the past 12 months, do you believe the homeless problem has gotten better, worse, or is it about the same?



Do you believe the homeless problem in Hawaii is:

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED
Impacting us economically, by discouraging visitors to return?	54%	40%	5%
Impacting your own quality of life, through beaches, parks, sidewalks and other places they congregate?	58%	39%	2%
Such a big problem that it will never be resolved?	42%	54%	4%

Poll was conducted among 542 registered voters statewide by telephone (landlines and cellphones) Feb. 1-11 by Ward Research. The margin of error is plus or minus 3.9 percentage points. Some numbers do not total 100 percent because of rounding.

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