

# Public Views on Sea Level Rise in Hawai‘i: Results from a Statewide Survey



02/06/2026  
Presentation to MACZAC

PRESENTATORS:  
Ketty A. Loeb, UH Mānoa Institute for Sustainability & Resilience  
Zena Grecni, Arizona State University & Pacific RISA

# Introduction

## MOTIVATIONS & PURPOSE

Hawai‘i is highly vulnerable to sea level rise (SLR); yet, no systematic evidence on public beliefs, risk perceptions, and policy preferences existed

Our response: first statewide, representative survey of public attitudes toward SLR, fielded in summer 2025

The survey provides key new insights and areas of opportunity for policy making and coastal resilience initiatives



# Report: Public Views on Sea Level Rise in Hawai‘i: Results from a Statewide Survey

## → Research Team

**Ketty Loeb**, PhD, University of Hawai‘i  
Institute for Sustainability and Resilience

**Colin Moore**, PhD, University of Hawai‘i  
Economic Research Organization

**Zena Grecni**, MEM, Pacific RISA & Arizona  
State University

**Victoria Keener**, PhD, Pacific RISA & Arizona  
State University

Anticipated Publication Date:

February 16, 2026

## → Funding

The Global Futures Laboratory at Arizona  
State University

## → Suggested Citation

Loeb, Ketty, Colin Moore, Zena Grecni, Victoria Keener. (2026) *Public Views on Sea Level Rise in Hawai‘i: Results from a Statewide Survey*. University of Hawai‘i Economic Organization.

# Overview: Survey Methods

## HAWAI‘I STATEWIDE SEA LEVEL RISE SURVEY

- **Online and phone survey of Hawai‘i residents**

Conducted by polling firm FINN Partners (Anthology Research) July 22-Aug 30, 2025

- **1,314 completed responses**

Demographically weighted sample of adult residents across all four counties

- **Weighted data interpreted**

University of Hawai‘i and ASU researchers analyzed, interpreted, and visualized the data



Adapted from: US Fifth National Climate Assessment, Ch. 30, <https://nca5.climate.us/chapter/30>, © Shellie Habel

# Top Themes

## HAWAI‘I STATEWIDE SEA LEVEL RISE SURVEY

- **Unusually broad agreement that sea level rise is happening**

Agreement across political parties. Higher than national measures of belief in climate change

- **A strong sense of urgency about its impacts**

Residents widely think SLR is causing, or will cause, harm; perceived severity is high

- **Uncertainty about how long-term adaptation should be financed**

Many are willing to relocate for fair compensation; but willingness to pay for protection is limited



Maya Walton via © Hawai‘i Sea Grant King Tides Project, 2019  
[CC BY 4.0]

# KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS

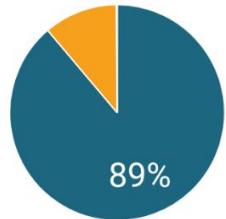
**RESULTS OF HAWAII STATEWIDE SEA LEVEL RISE SURVEY**

# An overwhelming majority of Hawai'i residents think sea level rise is happening

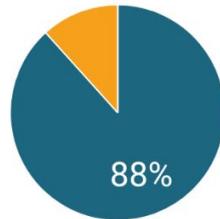


Q: Do you think sea level rise is happening?

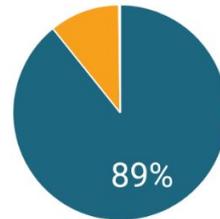
■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't Know/NA



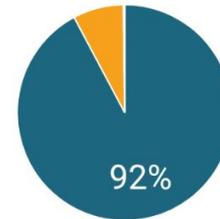
State



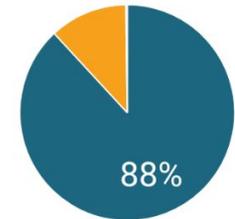
Honolulu Co



Hawai'i Co



Maui Co



Kaua'i Co

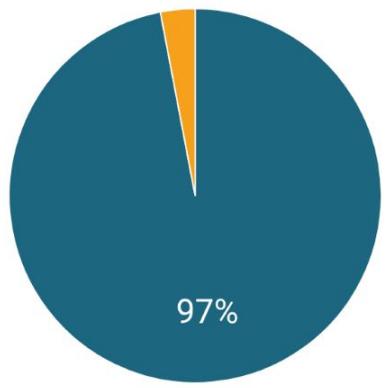
Chart: University of Hawai'i & Pacific Risa. Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper



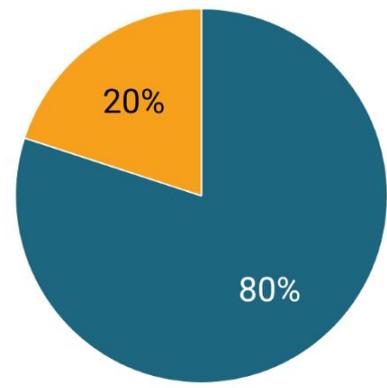
# Sea level rise beliefs by political party

Q: Do you think sea level rise is happening?

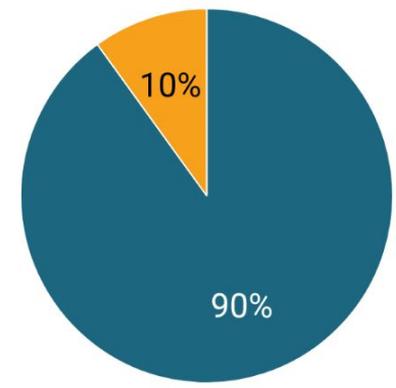
■ Yes  
■ No



Democrat



Republican



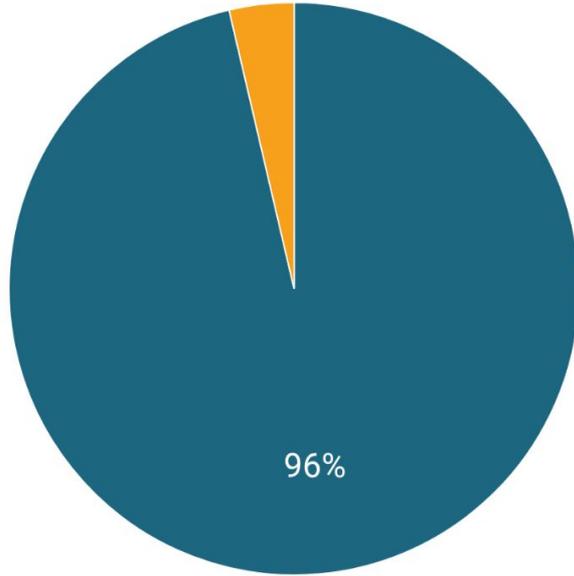
Independent

Chart: University of Hawai'i & Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper

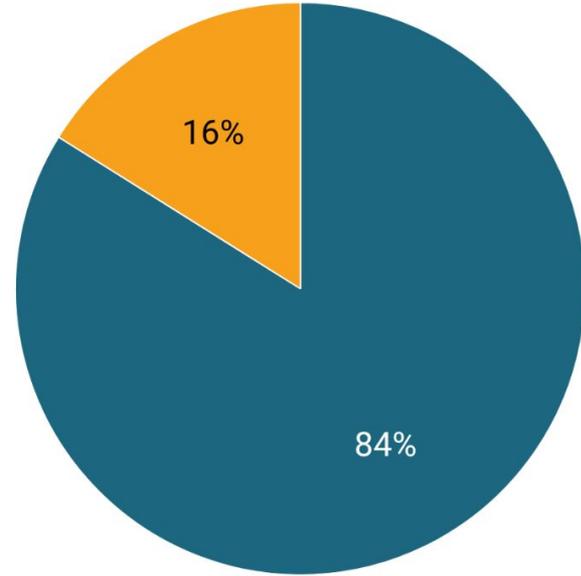
# Sea level rise beliefs by political ideology

Q. Do you think sea level rise is happening?

Yes  
No



Liberal



Conservative

Chart: University of Hawai'i & Pacific RISA. Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper

# Beliefs about the causes of sea level rise

Q. In your opinion, what is the cause of sea level rise?

■ A combination of human activity & natural processes ■ Human activity ■ Natural Processes ■ Something Else



Chart: University of Hawai'i & Pacific RISA. Source: UHERO. • Created with Datawrapper



# A minority of Hawai'i residents feel well informed about sea level rise

Q: How well informed do you feel about sea level rise?

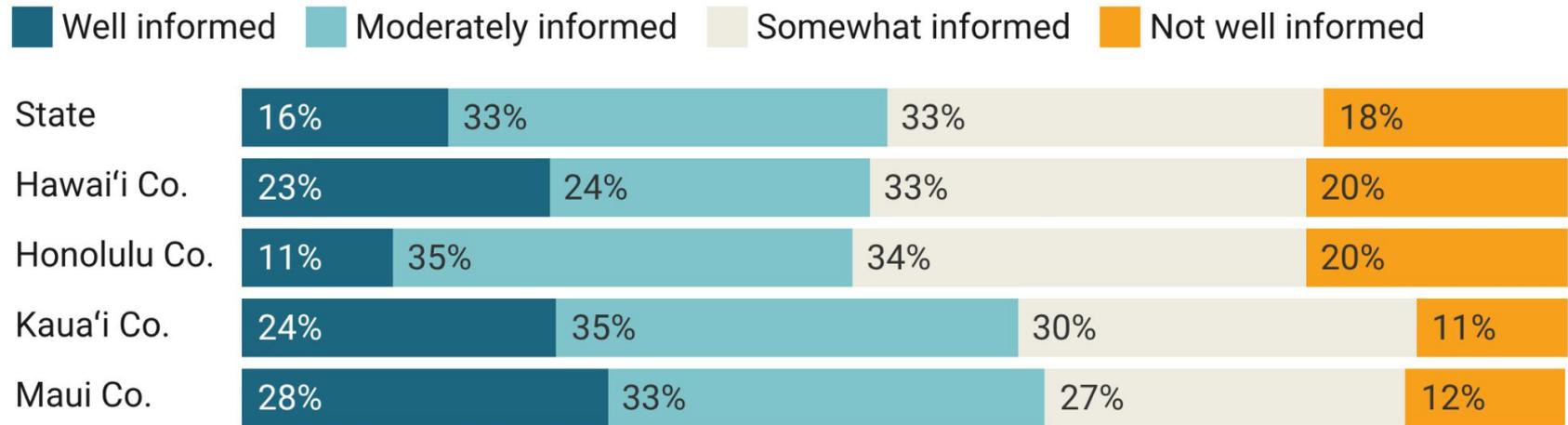


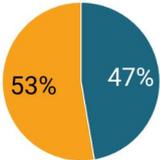
Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper

# Media Exposure to Topic: Sea Level Rise

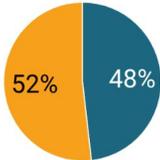


Q: In the past 90 day, have you heard anything about sea level rise in the local media?

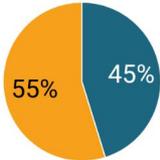
■ Yes ■ No



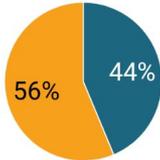
State



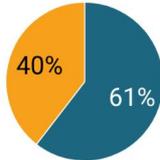
Hawai'i Co.



Honolulu Co.



Kaua'i Co.



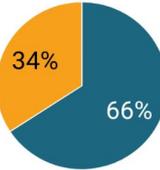
Maui Co.

Chart: University of Hawai'i & Pacific RISA. Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper

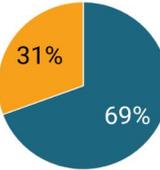
# Media Exposure to Topic: Coastal Erosion

Q: In the past 90 days, have you heard anything in the local media about coastal erosion?

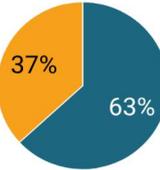
■ Yes ■ No



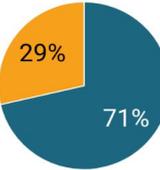
State



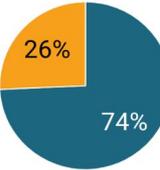
Hawai'i Co.



Honolulu Co.



Kaua'i Co.



Maui Co.

Chart: University of Hawai'i & Pacific RISA. Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper

# RISK PERCEPTIONS

**RESULTS OF HAWAII STATEWIDE SEA LEVEL RISE SURVEY**



# Majorities of residents in the state and counties say sea level rise is already impacting people in Hawai'i or will within 10 years

Q: When do you think sea level rise will begin to impact people in Hawai'i?

■ It already has ■ Within next 10 years ■ In more than 10 years, but less than 25 years ■ In more than 25 years, but less than 50 years ■ More than 50 years from now ■ Never

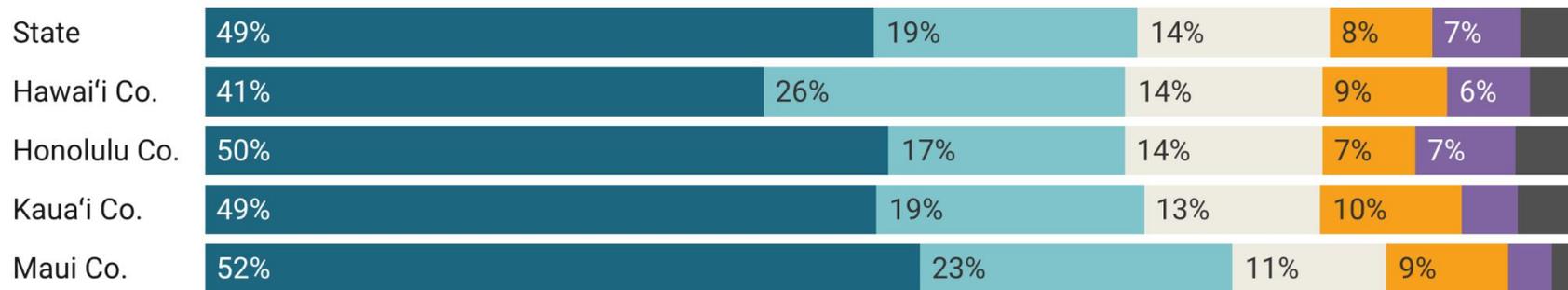


Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper

# Seven in ten Hawai'i residents think sea level rise has already damaged coastal infrastructure or will within 10 years

Q: When do you think sea level rise will begin to cause serious damage to roads, utilities, or buildings in coastal areas in Hawai'i?

■ It already has ■ Within next 10 years ■ In more than 10 years, but less than 25 years ■ In more than 25 years, but less than 50 years ■ >50 years from now ■ Never ■ Don't know/refused

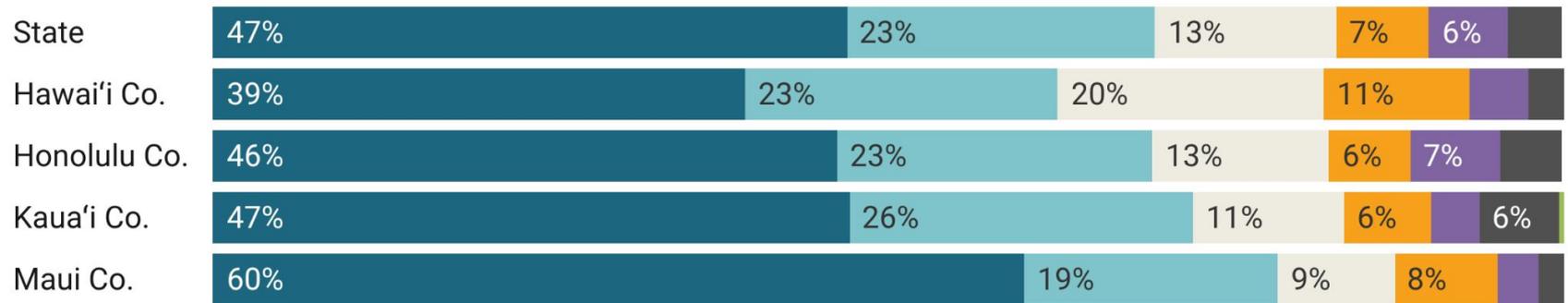


Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper



# Large majorities in each county think sea level rise will affect them or their family directly within 25 years

Q: When do you think sea level rise will begin to affect you or your family directly?

■ It already has ■ Within next 10 years ■ In more than 10 years, but less than 25 years ■ In more than 25 years, but less than 50 years ■ >50 years from now ■ Never ■ Don't know/refused

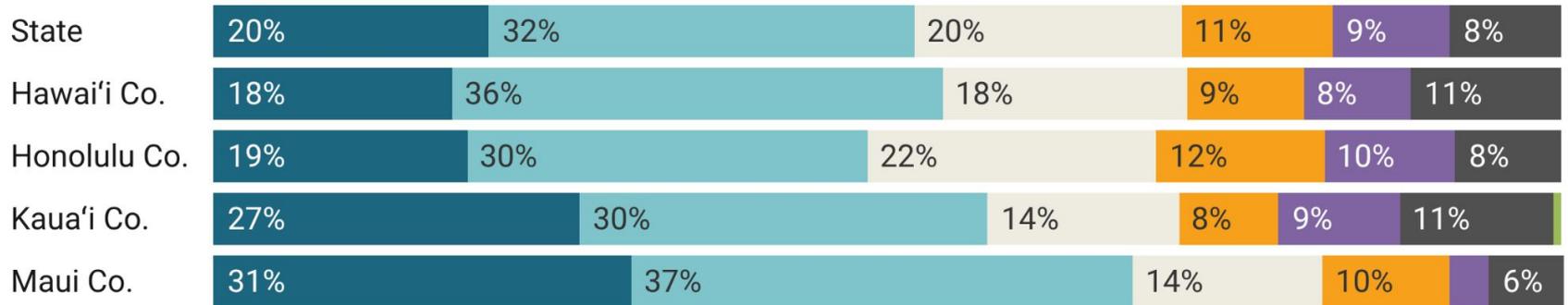


Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper



# A large majority of Hawai'i residents agree that the impacts of sea level rise will be catastrophic in the next fifty years

Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Over the next 50 years, the impacts of sea level rise in Hawai'i will be catastrophic.

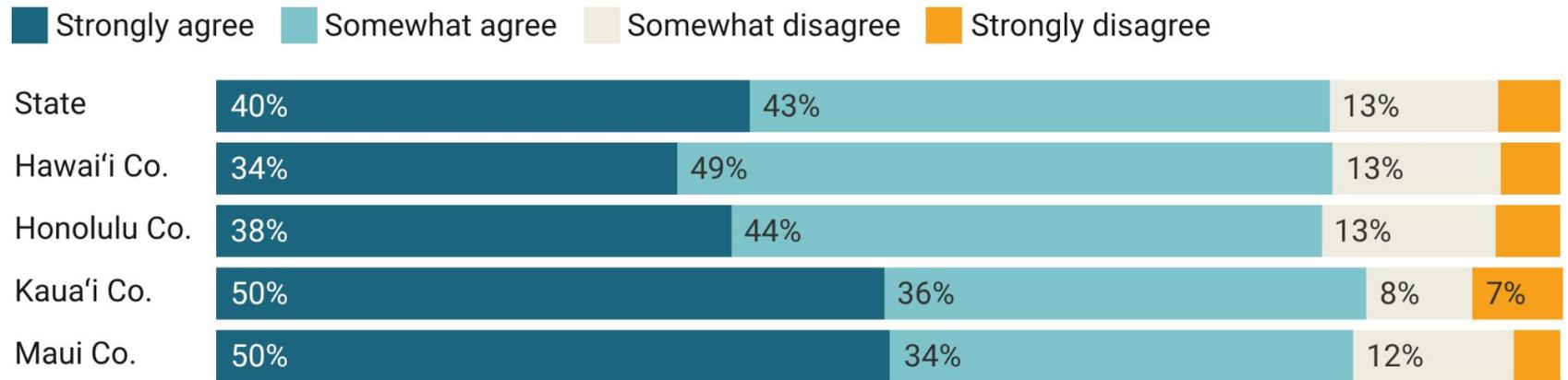


Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper

## Large majorities of Hawai'i residents expect various impacts in the next 50 years, if no action is taken to mitigate sea level rise

Q: Please indicate how likely you think each is to occur in Hawai'i in the next 50 years if no action is taken to mitigate sea level rise:

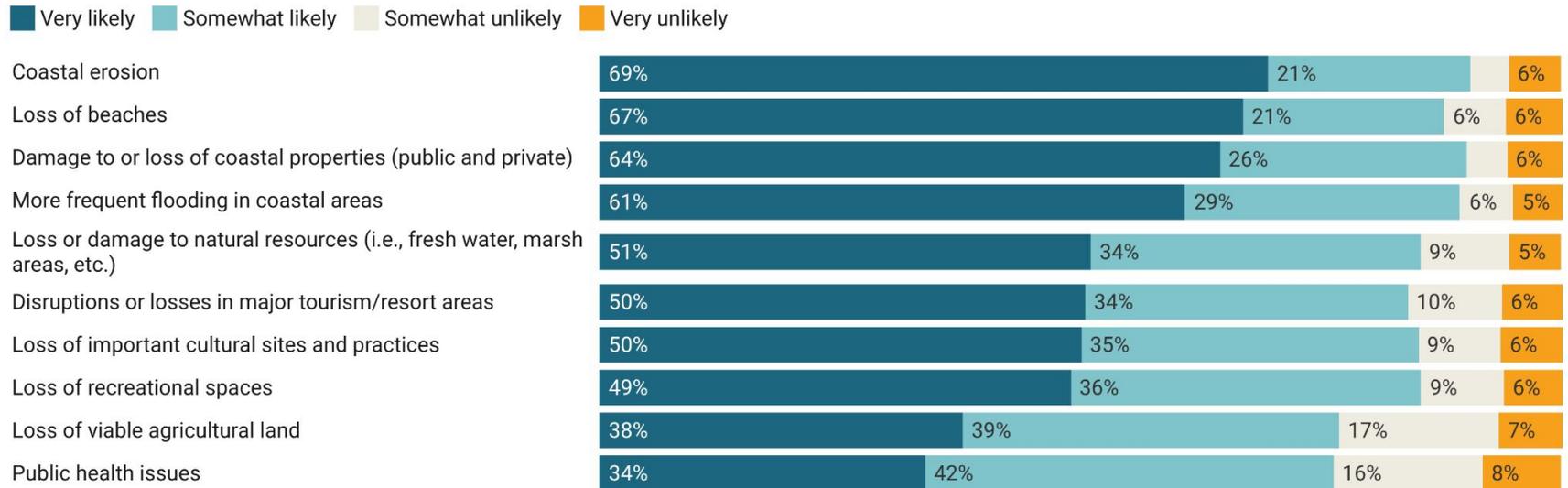


Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper



# Many residents say they have experienced increased costs from sea level rise or coastal flooding

Q: Yes or no, have you experienced any increase in costs that you believe are related to sea level rise or coastal flooding? Please consider costs related to housing, insurance maintenance or repairs, flood proofing, business or job disruptions, utility or infrastructure fees, etc.

■ Yes ■ No

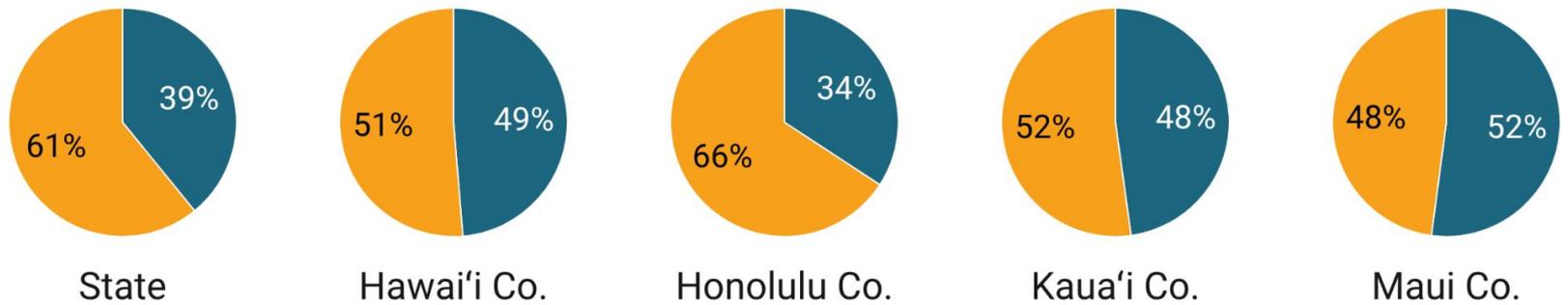


Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper

# A majority of Hawai'i residents think the state is unprepared for the impacts of sea level rise



Q: Overall, how well do you think the State of Hawai'i is prepared for the impacts of sea level rise?

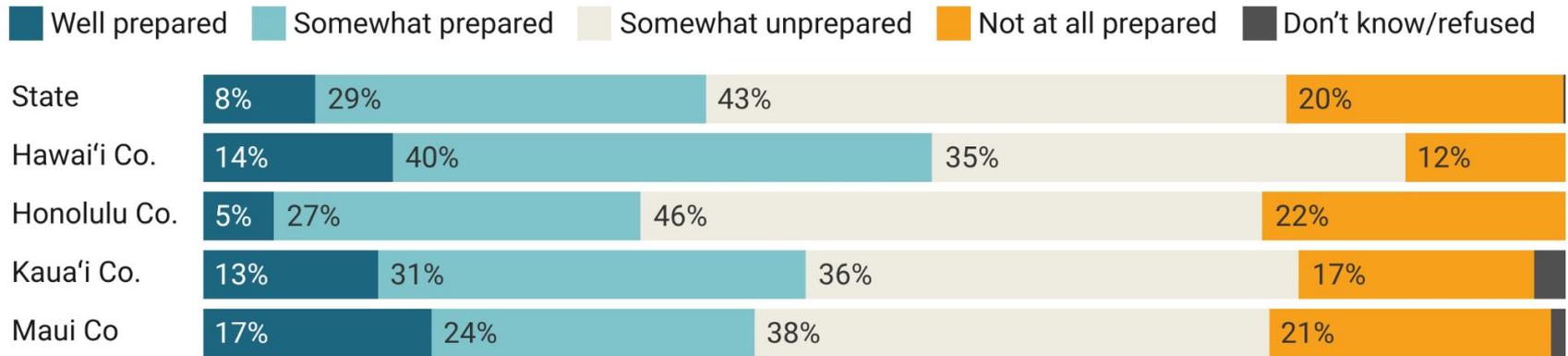


Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper



# A minority of Hawai'i residents think the counties are well prepared for sea level rise

Q: Overall, how well do you think the County is prepared for the impacts of sea level rise?

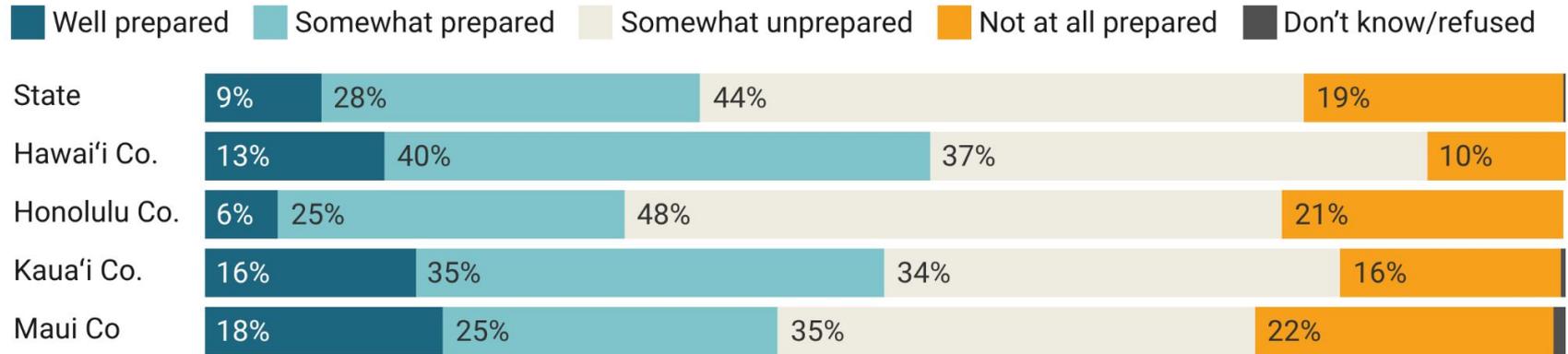


Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper

# POLICY PREFERENCES

**RESULTS OF HAWAII STATEWIDE SEA LEVEL RISE SURVEY**



# The vast majority of residents want lawmakers to act immediately

Q: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Government and lawmakers in Hawai'i should act immediately to prepare for sea-level rise.

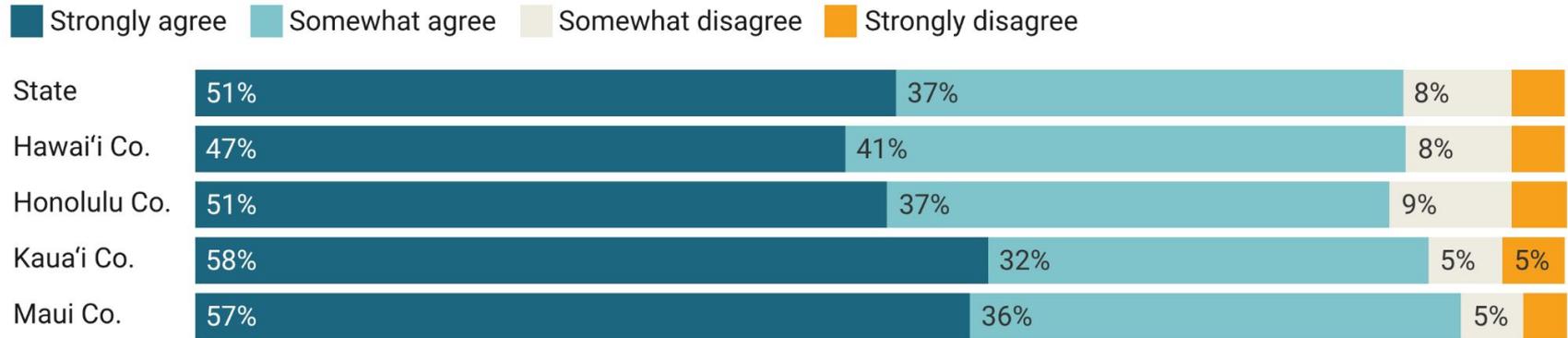


Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper



# Statewide, residents are divided on allowing coastal property owners to protect their property from sea level rise

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Coastal property owners should be allowed to protect their property from sea level rise even if it would negatively impact public resources and land.

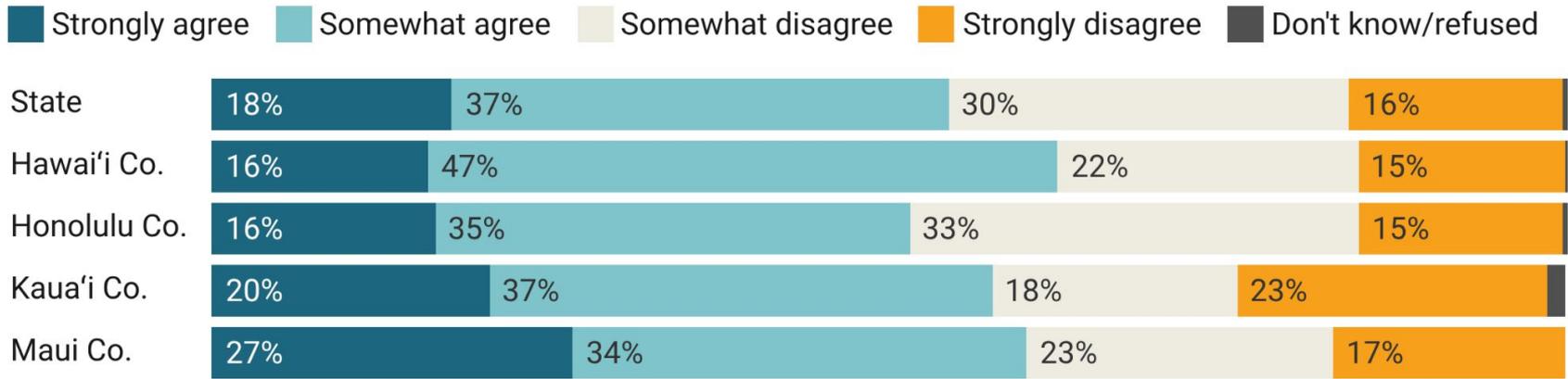


Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper

# About two thirds of Hawai'i residents agree the government should protect private coastal property from sea level rise

Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Government should protect private coastal property from sea level rise.

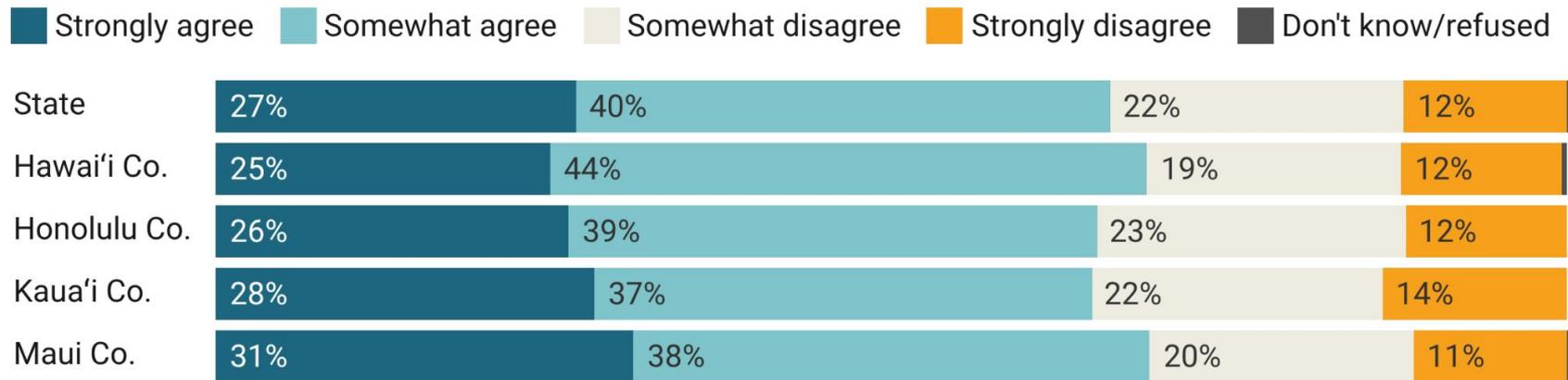


Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper

## Support for building sea walls to protect public infrastructure

Q: To what extent do you support or oppose the following actions and policies to address sea level rise? Build sea walls to protect public property and infrastructure.

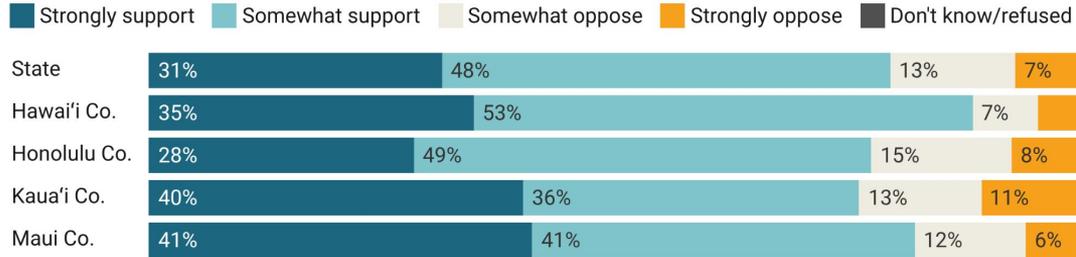


Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper

## Support for building sea walls to protect private property

Q: To what extent do you support or oppose the following actions and policies to address sea level rise? Build sea walls to protect private property.

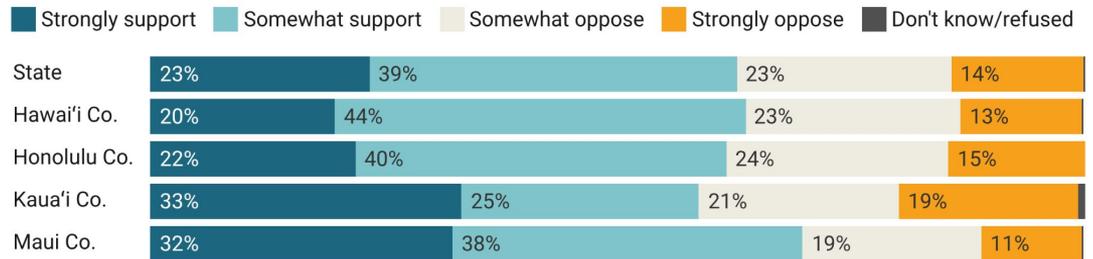


Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper



# Support for restricting development in flood-prone areas

Q: To what extent do you support or oppose the following actions and policies to address SLR?  
Restrict development in flood-prone areas

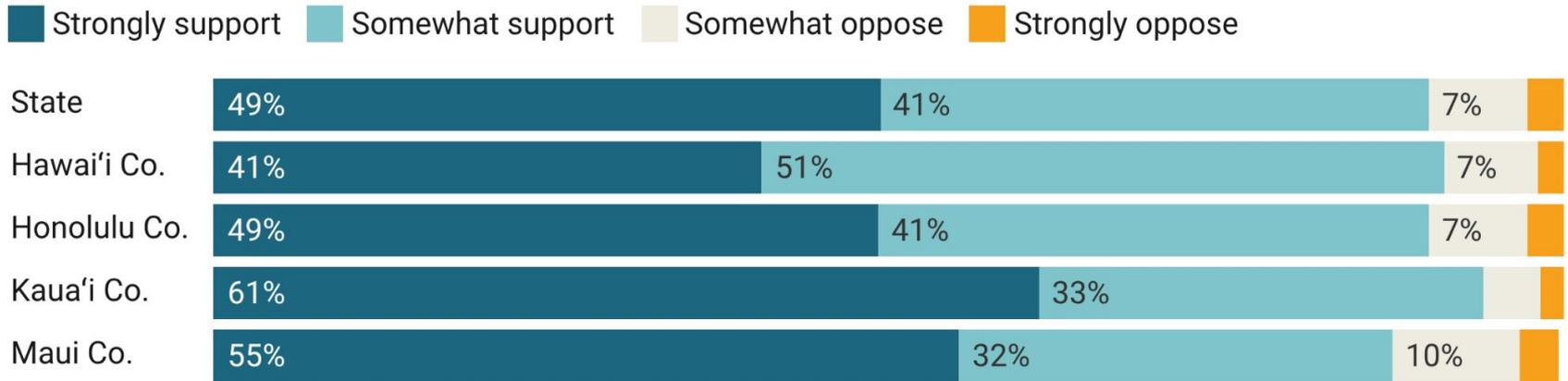


Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper

# Support for prioritizing inland development rather than coastal development

Q: To what extent do you support or oppose the following actions and policies to address sea level rise? Prioritize inland development rather than coastal development.

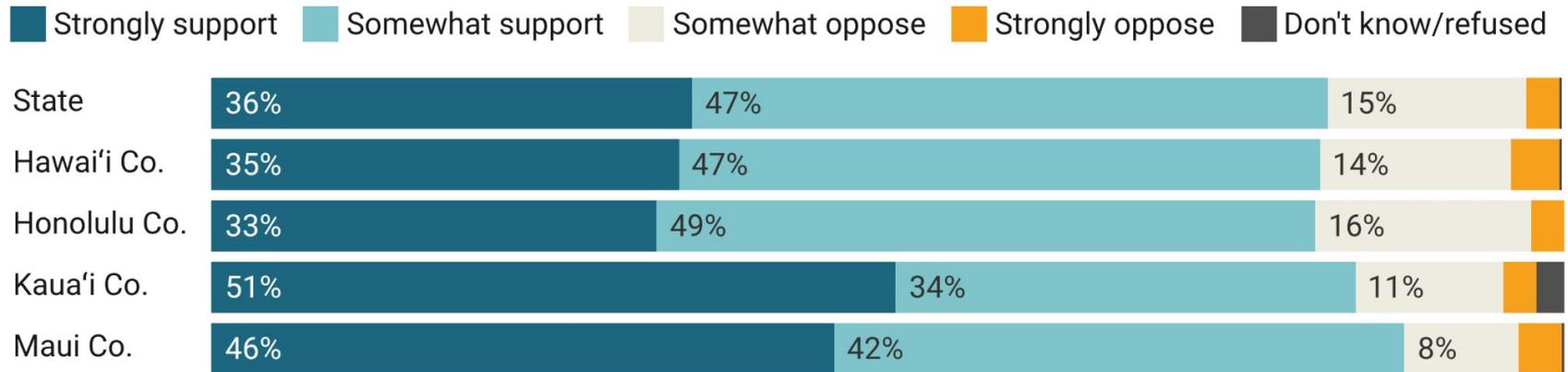


Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper

# Support for prioritizing inland development rather than coastal development

Q: To what extent do you support or oppose the following actions and policies to address sea level rise? Prioritize inland development rather than coastal development.

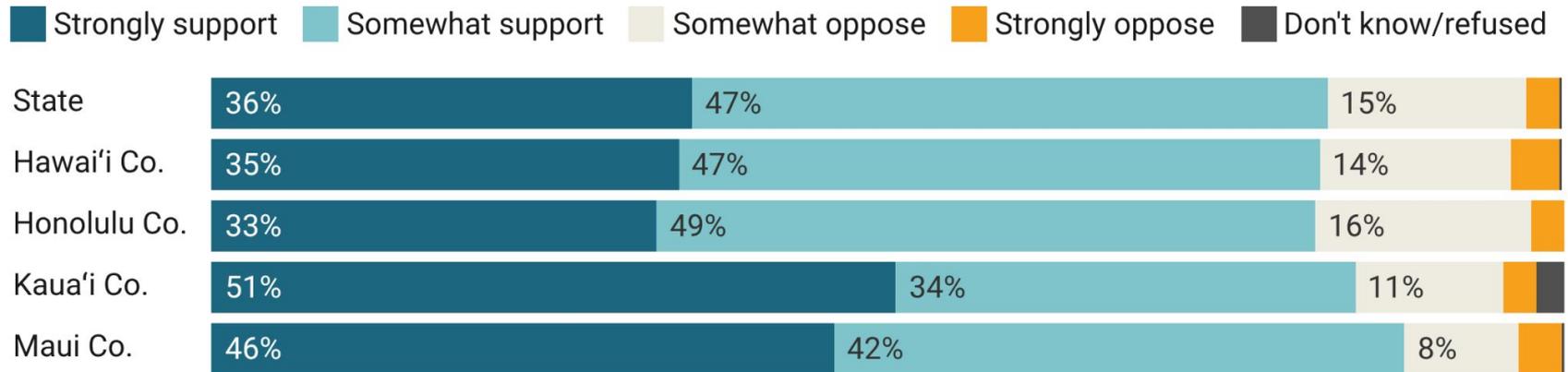


Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper



# Support for providing government funding to purchase coastal lands to maintain and restore natural areas

Q: To what extent do you support or oppose the following actions and policies to address sea level rise? Provide government funding to purchase coastal lands to maintain and restore natural areas (coral reefs, wetlands, etc.) as buffers against sea level rise.

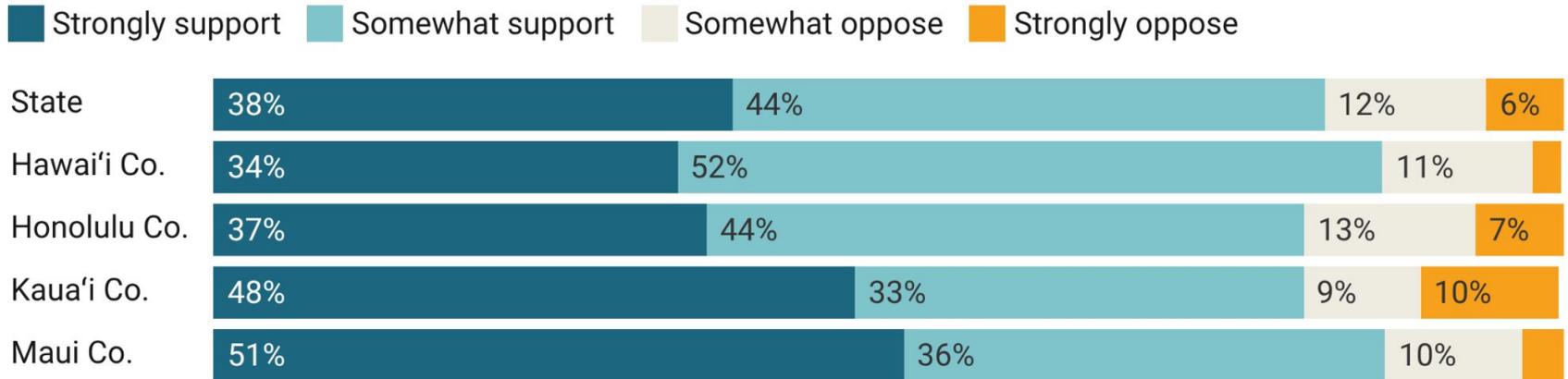


Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper

# Support for providing government funding to help property owners in flood-prone locations vacate their homes

Q: To what extent do you support or oppose the following actions and policies to address sea level rise? Provide government funding to help property owners in flood-prone areas vacate their homes.

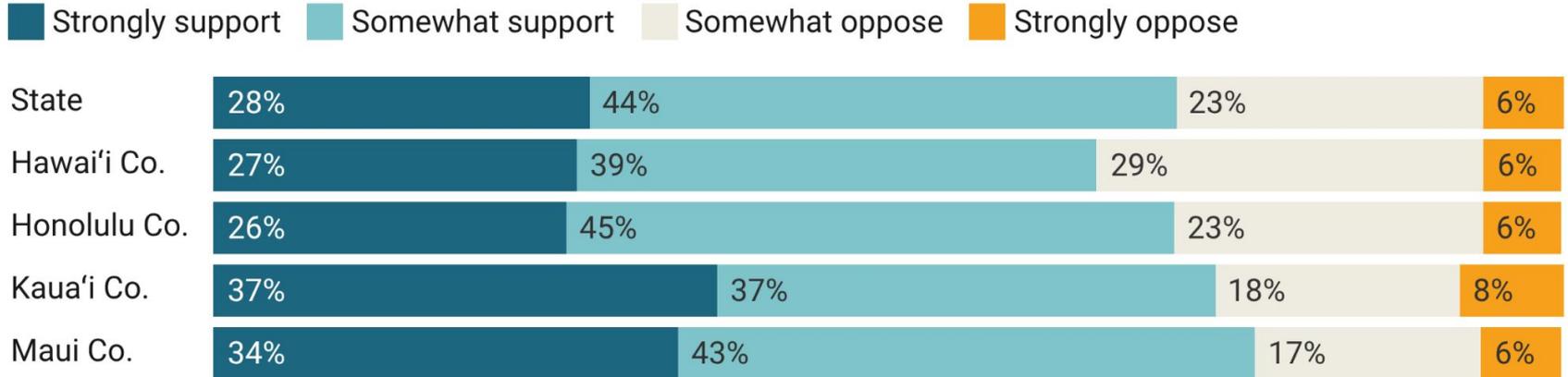


Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper

# Support for providing tax breaks or other financial incentives to help owners in coastal areas elevate or flood-proof their buildings

Q: To what extent do you support or oppose the following actions and policies to address sea level rise? Provide tax breaks or other financial incentives to help owners in coastal areas elevate or flood-proof their buildings.

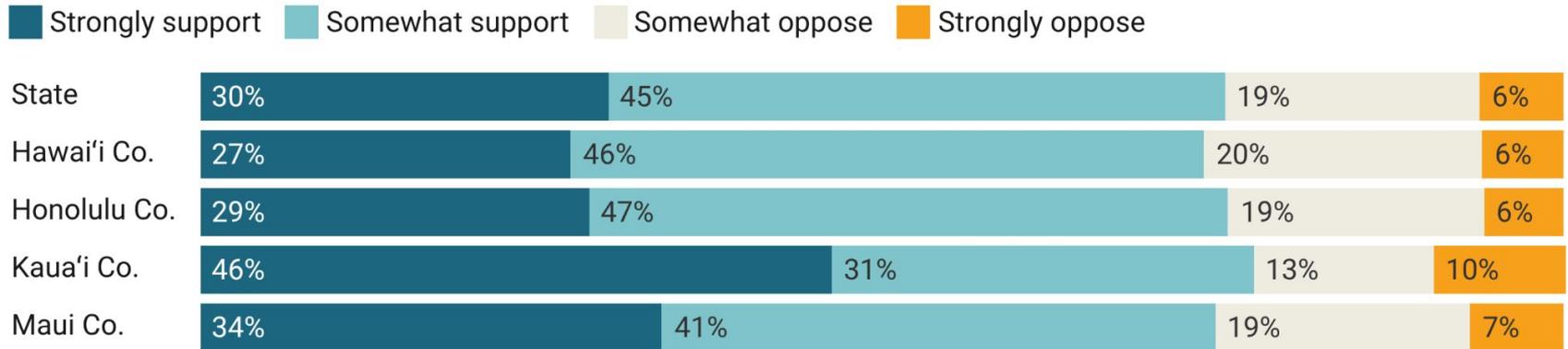


Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper

# Support for allowing more individuals and businesses to qualify for state-funded flood insurance

Q: To what extent do you support or oppose the following actions and policies to address sea level rise? Allow more individuals and businesses in Hawai'i to qualify for participation in a state-funded flood insurance program

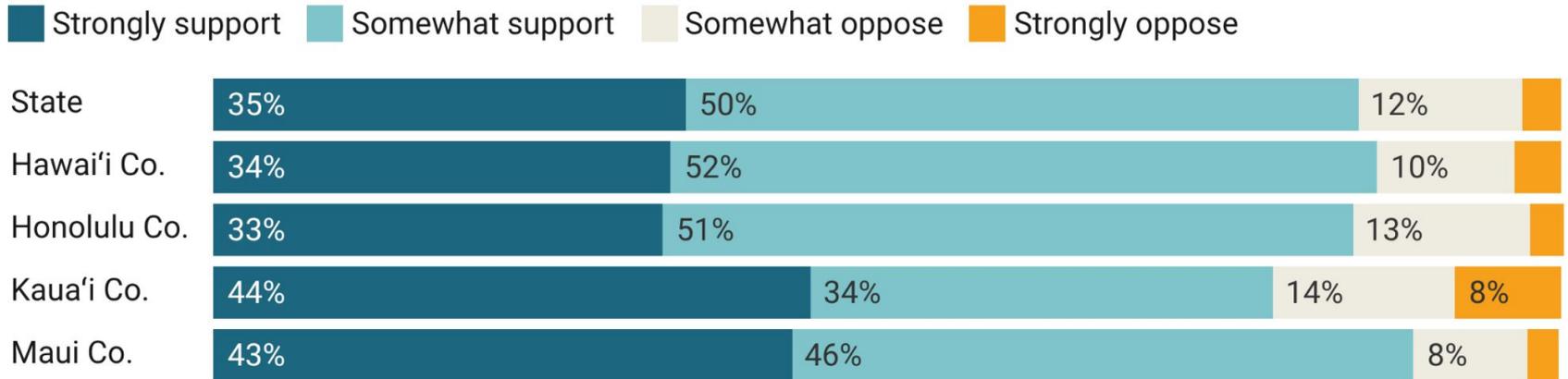


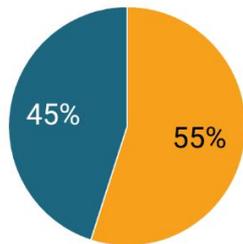
Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper



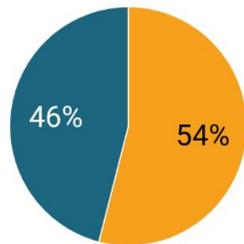
## Mixed views on paying more for sea-level rise protection

Q: Would you be willing to pay higher taxes and fees to fund projects that protect your neighborhood from sea level rise?

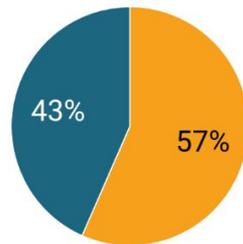
■ No ■ Yes



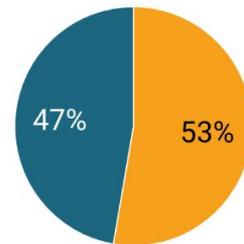
State



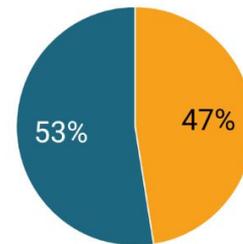
Hawai'i Co.



Honolulu Co.



Kaua'i Co.



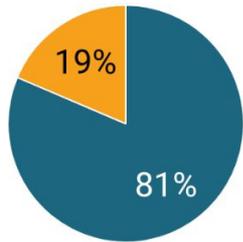
Maui Co.

Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper

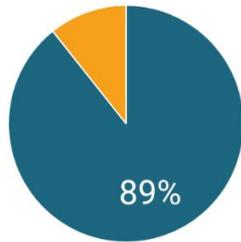
# Most residents are willing to relocate for fair compensation

Q: Would you be willing to move away from an area identified as high risk for SLR-related flooding if offered fair compensation?

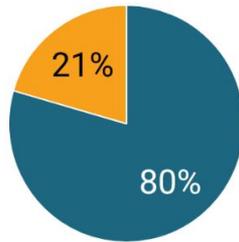
■ Yes ■ No



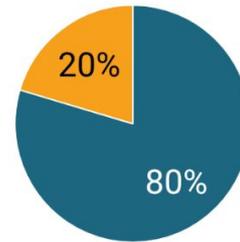
State



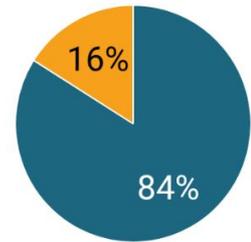
Hawai'i Co.



Honolulu Co.



Kaua'i Co.



Maui Co.

Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper



# Support for investing in public education about the impacts of sea level rise and what people can do to prepare

Q: To what extent do you support or oppose the following actions and policies to address sea level rise? Invest in public education about the impacts of sea level rise and what people can do to prepare.

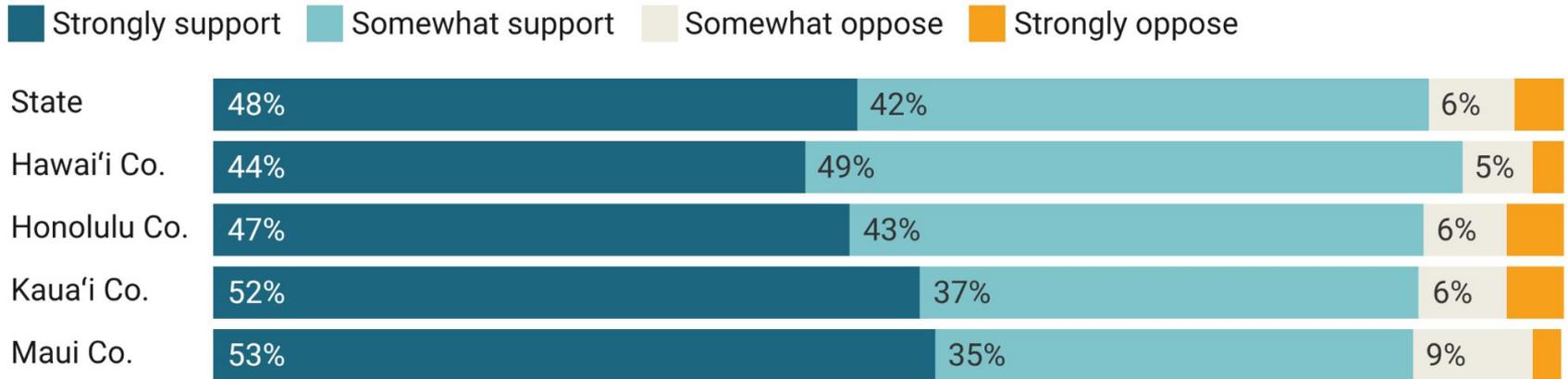


Chart: University of Hawai'i and Pacific RISA • Source: UHERO • Created with Datawrapper

# Results: Summary

## KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS

Belief that sea level rise is occurring is nearly universal (89% of residents).

This consensus extends across political parties.

Most residents attribute SLR to both human and natural causes.

Many Hawai'i residents are hearing about coastal erosion and sea level rise in the media.

Only 16% of residents say they feel well-informed about SLR.

## RISK PERCEPTIONS

Concern about future harm from SLR is widespread.

A strong majority (89%) say SLR is likely to cause harm to Hawai'i.

Residents anticipate direct personal effects.

Costs are already being felt by many households.

Perceived severity of impacts is high.

Most residents say the State and counties are unprepared.

## POLICY PREFERENCES

Residents want leaders to act now.

Limiting exposure to coastal hazards has strong support.

Many are willing to relocate from high-risk areas if compensated fairly.

Residents support a robust government role in assisting coastal property owners.

Residents are divided on private sea walls and on paying more to protect their neighborhoods.

There is strong support for investment in education.

→ Discussion

# Next Steps

- Survey report, blog published via UHERO (~February 16)
- Media Release: UH News, video coverage (~February 16)
- Presentations (National Adaptation Forum, PRiMO)
- Articles for Peer Review
- Funding for longitudinal surveys?

# Partner Surveys

→ **Hawai‘i’s Elected Officials**

→ **Hawai‘i’s Civil Servants**

Surveys and Survey tools available at:

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/isr/research/coastal-adaptation.php>

# Find us online

## HAWAI‘I STATEWIDE SEA LEVEL RISE SURVEY

### UHERO

uhero.hawaii.edu



colindmoore@hawaii.edu



### UH Mānoa Institute for Sustainability & Resilience

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/isr/>

kloeb@hawaii.edu



### Pacific RISA

PacificRISA.org



Zena.Grecni@asu.edu



### The Global Futures Laboratory at Arizona State University

globalfutures.asu.edu

X: @asuglobalfuture

