

The Northern California Nightmare Of Politicians Owned By Google's Covert Stock Market Bribes

USA Today's Erica Hellerstein reports on the nightmare of socialist hell that northern California has turned into under the Democrat leadership: "...The first thing locals mention are the homeless who line the streets of densely populated city blocks. They sleep restlessly in RVs; in vast encampments under the freeway; in tents in front of artisan coffee shops; on scraps of cardboard and discarded mattresses; on subway car seats that lurch from one end of town to another.

This is the Bay Area in 2020, infamous for its [homelessness crisis](#) and rising inequality, where the gulf between the rich and the poor can be seen every day on the street. Tents are propped up in front of swanky restaurants and boutique gyms; the impoverished [pick through techies' trash](#); misery laps up against luxury, all while the elements rage — fires, earthquakes, drought.

I finally returned to this place, where I was born and bred, as a journalist last June, after spending years away reporting in North Carolina, Washington, D.C., Honduras, Mexico, Colombia and Argentina.

Yet my homecoming was fraught. Just a few months before I moved back, I lost my best friend to a traumatic and unexpected death. When I got there, I was overwhelmed by my grief and terrified of what I would find in a place built on 28 years of our shared history, from our local Thai haunts to Berkeley's Tilden Park and the campgrounds of Big Sur.

Imposing geography, crushing poverty

But quickly the Bay Area itself demanded my attention. Spread across [nine Pacific coast counties](#), it commands an immense physical space and, as home to Silicon Valley, it has a particular weight in the popular imagination.

It still looked the same to me as when I left in 2006, with its glorious ocean vistas, winding hills and abundant gardens, but it was profoundly different. Skyrocketing [rents](#), [homelessness](#), rising [inequality](#), a migrating [creative class](#) — these are the concerns foremost on many local minds. Local and national news outlets debate whether San Francisco could be fixed at all — or claimed the city was irrevocably broken.

My job brings me into close contact with all of these problems, reacquainting me with my hometown through the occasional fog of grief. As [I reported](#) in my early months on the beat, the gap between the haves and have-nots in California is growing ever larger, with the top 5% of households in places like San Francisco County earning an average of \$808,105 a year, compared with \$16,184 for the lowest 20%.

[More than half of Latinos](#), who make up [nearly 40% of the state population](#), struggle to make ends meet at all.

Meanwhile, homelessness is on the rise. From 2017 to 2019, it [increased by 47%](#) in Oakland; in Sunnyvale, it [surged by 147%](#) over the same time period. The housing crisis is creating a new breed of supercommuters, who spend hours navigating the region's maze of highways each day.

In Santa Cruz County, I spoke to Ernestina Solorio, a single mother struggling to make ends meet on her farmworker salary. She stopped by an [underground food bank for farm workers](#) living in poverty who were too scared to go to public food banks for fear of immigration raids. I met her in an alleyway and spent the day talking to farmworkers who couldn't afford to eat the food they harvest. One farmworker who volunteers with the food bank told me she has trouble surviving on her salary, stretching her paychecks between rent, her children, food and her mother back in Mexico. She knows what it's like to earn so little, so she helps others.

Farther down the coast, in Half Moon Bay, I covered the city as it [rallied behind nearly 200 farmworkers](#) who were losing their jobs at a beloved Japanese American flower company in the face of an increasingly global, competitive flower market and changing regional economy. People who had been at the company for decades were helping their colleagues find hope and new jobs. They have to move forward, one worker told me."

San Francisco is a tough place live for a lot of reasons.

Sky-high housing prices can make it nearly impossible to find a place. In February, a [1,000-square-foot home](#) with no working plumbing and a pile of rotting mattresses stacked in the kitchen sold for more than \$520,000.

Even [tech moguls](#) and [startup founders](#) are having trouble finding homes in an area where nearly every spare piece of real estate is gobbled up by the highest bidder. One firm estimated that a home buyer needs to make about [\\$300,000 a year](#) just to afford a median-priced abode.

But San Francisco isn't just perilously overpriced: It's also perpetually teetering on the edge of disaster. On October 18, the city of San Francisco participated in an annual earthquake drill called the [Great California Shakeout](#), a dry run where [more than 10 million people](#) across the state practiced a "drop, cover, and hold on" earthquake survival protocol.


None of those people are quite old enough to remember this, but on April 18, 1906, a violent [~7.7-7.9 magnitude](#) earthquake leveled the city into ruins. The minute-long quake ruptured [296 miles](#) of California coastline, sparked three days of fires, and killed 3,000 people, leaving the bulk of the city homeless.

That was just 112 years ago — the geologic equivalent of the blink of an eye.

If earthquakes don't shake you, consider that the city is literally sinking into mud — and into trash in certain places.

Real-estate woes aside, here are the ways that scientists know living in the Bay Area is not for the faint of heart:


The Bay Area is a veritable smorgasbord of complex fault lines. No less than seven different faults converge here.

 North California San Francisco Fault Lines
Earthquake faults in the San Francisco Bay Area, drawn
in red.
United States Geological Survey

The well-known San Andreas Fault is just one of the seven "significant fault zones" the [US Geological Survey \(USGS\)](#) cites in the Bay Area. The others are the Calaveras, Concord-Green Valley, Greenville, Hayward, Rodgers Creek, and San Gregorio Faults.

People who live in the area [experience small earthquakes and shakes](#) all the time. But those aren't the rumbles that scare seismologists.

It's the bigger, disastrous quakes scientists are really worried about. And they say San Francisco is due for another soon.

 San Francisco earthquake 1906

Associated Press

In 2007, the [USGS determined](#) that there was about a "63% probability of a magnitude 6.7 or greater earthquake in the Bay Area" by 2037.

Estimates have only gotten worse since then. One [recent report suggested](#) that there is a 76% chance the Bay Area will experience a magnitude 7.0 earthquake within the next three decades.

Seismologists are most concerned about two fault lines in particular: the San Andreas and the Hayward.


san andreas fault

California's Antelope Valley freeway passes near folded layers of sediment above the San Andreas Fault.

David McNew/Getty Images


Anything higher than a 7.9 on the San Andreas Fault line, which runs from Mendocino to Mexico, would put "approximately 100%" of the population of San Francisco at risk, while a 6.9 quake from the Hayward Fault could spell trouble for nearly everyone who lives and works there, [according to the city](#).

At least 300 buildings sit directly on top of the Hayward Fault, and another two million in the San Francisco Bay area would also be under threat if a big quake hit the region.

 San Francisco
heyengel/Shutterstock


Scientists warn that [more than 22,000 people](#) might need to be rescued from stalled elevators, while another 411,000 people could become [homeless](#).

The USGS predicts that at least 800 people would be killed and 18,000 more injured, if a hypothetical 7.0 hit nearby Oakland, California.

 people walking oakland california
Oakland, California.
cdrin/shutterstock

[The scientists warn](#) the threat of a future earthquake like that "is real and could happen at any time."

Some geologists are already predicting that the period from 2018 to 2021 will be an especially rocky one.

 tectonic plates iceland hiking
Ariane Hoehne/Shutterstock.com

The Earth is [turning a little slower than usual right now](#), which puts extra squeeze on tectonic plates and may mean more high-magnitude shakes are on the way.

Certain neighborhoods in the city are built on less-than-rock-solid heaps of trash.

 san francisco, marina district, earthquake, 1980s


The Marina district was hit hard by the 6.9 magnitude Loma Prieta Earthquake on October 17, 1989.

Otto Greule Jr /Getty

Old [19th-century trash that was dumped](#) out to widen the city could quickly level the bottoms of many homes during a big quake. It already did once in 1989.

Experts estimate that places like the Marina neighborhood, pictured above, would today be 50% destroyed by anything higher than a 7.0 magnitude earthquake on the San Andreas Fault.

And many of the cities tallest downtown buildings are sitting on ground that could easily liquify during a big earthquake.

downtown San Francisco
randy andy/Shutterstock

[The New York Times](#) recently estimated that more than 100 of the city's tallest buildings (higher than 22 stories) have been built in areas with a "very high" chance of liquefaction in an earthquake.


But San Francisco's quake threat doesn't stop at the shore. Tremors could hit the city from the sea, if powerful tsunamis rush in from places across the water like Russia, Alaska, or Japan.

 Golden Gate Bridge couple
Flickr/Scott Loftesness

That's less likely than a Californian earthquake, because typically, tsunami waves aren't super serious once they reach San Francisco's shores. [According to the city](#), most of the tsunamis that hit the Bay Area from Alaskan earthquakes are less than 1 foot high by the time they make landfall.

But there's still a chance that a tsunami moving in from the Cascadia subduction zone (which stretches from Canada's Vancouver Island into Northern California) could come into the Bay Area at more than 16 feet high, UC Santa Cruz earth sciences professor Steven Ward [told KQED](#).

Earthquakes can also unleash tough-to-control fires, as they did here in 1906, covering much of the city in flames and smoke.

 1906 earthquake fire san francisco
Wikimedia Commons

Thankfully, the [city itself isn't perpetually threatened by wildfires](#), like much of the rest of the state. But the nearby vineyards of Napa Valley did not escape the [2017 wildfire season unscathed](#).

In October 2017, more than 3,500 homes, buildings, and other structures in the Napa Valley were reduced to ash. At least 31 people were killed.

 napa sonoma fire wildfire 2017

A resident rushes to save his home as an out of control wildfire moves through, on October 9, 2017, in Sonoma County (Glen Ellen), California.

Justin Sullivan/Getty

Many people in San Francisco took to [wearing masks](#) so they wouldn't have to breathe the smoky fumes wafting in.

In November of this year, wildfire smoke that drifted into the city from the nearby Camp Fire made it so tough to breathe that officials canceled school, and museums offered free admission to keep people out of the smoke.

 camp fire san francisco city smoke 2
Katie Canales/Business Insider

Soot and chemicals released from the flames of the Camp Fire traveled more than 170 miles to San Francisco.

In the days after the [devastatingly deadly fire](#) broke out in the Sierra Nevada foothills, the [Environmental Protection Agency described the air](#) quality throughout much of the Bay Area as "unhealthy" or "very unhealthy." It stayed that way for nearly two weeks.

California is currently suffering through [its longest drought](#) to date, and experts believe wildfires in the state will only become stronger and more common as the planet heats up further.

In the nearby East Bay, a 1991 "firestorm" triggered by a grass fire killed 25 people.

 oakland firestorm

Firefighters walk up Rockridge Boulevard toward burning homes in Oakland on October 20, 1991.

AP Photo/Olga Shalygin

East Bay resident Will Wright, who had a near-death experience when his home burned to the ground, was inspired by the tragedy to create the wildly popular game "The Sims," according to local news site [Berkeleyside](#).

Shaking aside, the region is bracing to see more water coming in over the next several decades.

 facebook office

Climate Central

The water level in the Bay Area has [risen 8 inches](#) over the past 100 years.


Researchers estimate that by 2100, [the sea will rise](#) anywhere from [2.4 feet to nearly 4.5](#) on the California coast, putting the [headquarters of Silicon Valley companies like Facebook and Yahoo underwater](#), if nothing more is done to mitigate the effects of climate change.

In 2016, the city of San Francisco estimated sea levels there would rise 66 inches by 2100. That's 5 1/2 feet.

 san francisco
Shutterstock


Today, with the accelerating pace of polar ice melt, the state says the 2100 [water level could be much higher](#), increasing by [more than 9 feet](#) as Antarctic ice sheets quickly thaw.

The sea change won't come cheap. At least \$62 billion in property and infrastructure is at risk.

 lombard street san francisco
Flickr / Marit & Toomas Hinnosaar

That's [the calculation](#) with just a modest 4 feet of sea level rise.

But the flooding problems don't end with seawater. San Francisco is also sinking into the ground at a rate of about 10 millimeters a year.

 San Francisco
Richard Heyes/Flickr

The natural [caving-in process](#) at work is called "subsidence," and it's happening because the city is built on heaps of trash and Holocene-era mud that's slipping away.

And more more frequent storms could make landslides and flooding more common.

san francisco flood

Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

"Severe storms can cause landslides, coastal flooding, and stormwater ponding," [the city warns](#). Scientists [predict we'll see many more](#) of those kinds of events in the coming years, as more "surprise" and potentially irreversible climate events crop up around the globe.

California's seemingly never-ending series of droughts is also a concern for San Francisco Bay Area residents.

 San Francisco
Facebook/SF Gate

Supplying Californians with enough water is increasingly becoming an expensive problem. The [Pacific Institute estimates](#) that municipal water costs in California metro areas rose at two to three times the rate of inflation between 2000 and 2010.

California is currently suffering through [its longest drought to date](#), which started in 2011.

With more extreme climate shifts and heat waves on the way, San Francisco will have an unusual problem on its hands: a lack of air-conditioners.


heat wave san francisco

Temperatures topped out around 90 degrees on the beach at Crissy Field on May 7, 2007 during a heat wave.
Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

With [extreme weather events and heat waves](#) on the rise around the world, people in San Francisco may have a tougher time than other Americans finding relief from scorching temperatures at home, at least in the near future.

According to the 2011 housing survey of the US Census, "the Bay Area had the lowest percentage of housing units with central air-conditioning (10%) of any region in the country," the [San Francisco Business Times reports](#). That compares with 66% of people nationwide who said they have central air at home.

If you decide to stick around the Bay Area, it's probably time to make sure you're prepared for all these various disasters with a well-stocked emergency kit.

 emergency preparedness supply kit
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The [San Francisco Department of Emergency Management](#) suggests having enough water, nonperishable food, and flashlight batteries on hand to last about three days. Because in San Francisco, you just never know.