



California's Population

Hans Johnson, Eric McGhee,
and Marisol Cuellar Mejia

One in eight US residents lives in California.

- ▶ With over 39 million people (according to July 2022 Census Bureau estimates), California is the nation's most populous state—its population is much larger than that of second-place Texas (30 million) and third-place Florida (22 million).
- ▶ The California Department of Finance currently projects that the state's population will reach almost 42 million by 2030, but new projections to be released this year are likely to be lower.

California's population growth has slowed dramatically in the 21st century.

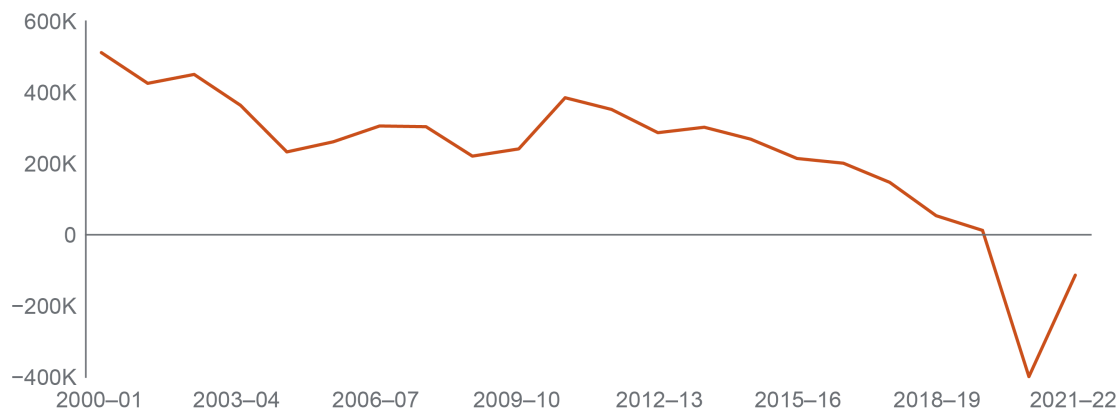
- ▶ Since 2000, California has experienced its slowest rates of growth ever recorded.
- ▶ From 2010 to 2020, California's population grew by 5.8% (or 2.4 million), according to decennial census counts. This was slower than the rate of growth in the rest of the nation (6.8%), leading to the loss of a seat in the US House of Representatives for the first time in California's history.
- ▶ These recent rates are dramatically lower than the growth throughout the 20th century. From 1900 to 1950, California's population rose from under 2 million to 10 million. It more than tripled in the last half of the century, reaching 34 million by 2000, and its growth rate was much higher than that of the rest of the United States.

California's population declined during the pandemic.

- ▶ After peaking in January 2020 at 39.6 million, California lost 600,000 people as of July 2022. Most of the loss occurred during the first year of the pandemic. An increase in deaths, [sharp declines in international migration](#), and [a rise in residents moving to other states](#) account for the losses.
- ▶ Most of the increase in deaths was due to COVID-19, according to the CDC. Moreover, birth rates have hit record lows, after declining over several decades. Birth and death trends are similar in the rest of the nation.
- ▶ The number of residents moving to other states reached its highest level ever during the pandemic, and international migration fell to its lowest level in decades (according to Census Bureau estimates). However, recent Census estimates show that net immigration to California increased from July 2021 through July 2022.
- ▶ The population declines are widespread, with 34 of the state's 58 counties experiencing losses from January 2020 to July 2022.

California's population has declined in recent years

Annual population change



Sources: California Department of Finance Population Estimates 2000 to 2020 (E-6). Census Bureau 2021–2022.

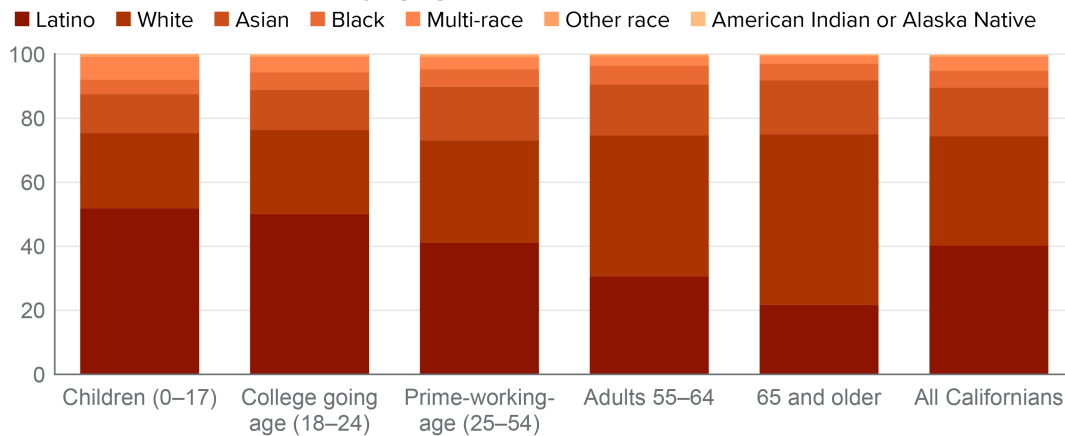
Note: July of each year.

California's population has become increasingly diverse.

- ▶ No race or ethnic group constitutes a majority of California's population: 39% of Californians are Latino, 35% are white, 15% are Asian American or Pacific Islander, 5% are Black, 4% are multiracial, and fewer than 1% are Native American or Alaska Natives, according to the 2020 Census. Only five other states (Hawaii, New Mexico, Texas, Nevada, and Maryland) have similarly diverse populations.
- ▶ More than half of young Californians (ages 24 and under) are Latino. Conversely, more than half of those 65 and older are white.

Latinos make up more than half of younger Californians

Percent distribution of the population by age groups



Source: American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2021.

Note: Asian includes Pacific Islander.

Over 10 million Californians are immigrants.

- ▶ According to the 2021 American Community Survey, [27% of Californians are foreign born](#)—twice the share in the rest of the nation (14%). Several other states have relatively high shares: New Jersey (23%), New York (22%), and Florida (21%).
- ▶ More than half (55%) of [foreign-born Californians](#) are naturalized US citizens—the largest share in over 40 years. Most other immigrants are legal permanent residents.

California is aging, but it is young compared to the rest of the country.

- ▶ In 2021, 15.2% of the state's population was 65 or older. The California Department of Finance projects that about one in five Californians will be 65 or older by 2030.
- ▶ However, California's population is the eleventh-youngest in the nation (Utah's population is the youngest). The median age in California is 37.6, compared to 38.8 nationwide, according to the 2021 American Community Survey.

Population loss has political consequences.

- ▶ California's lost congressional seat was unprecedented, but this outcome could have been worse. Updated population estimates suggest that if congressional districts had been allocated more recently, the state [might have lost two seats instead of one](#).
- ▶ In addition, sluggish or negative population growth in some parts of the state—including Los Angeles County and most rural areas—has reduced representation for those places compared to faster-growing areas like the Inland Empire or the Sacramento metropolitan area.
- ▶ While most migration out of California is driven by personal and financial factors, the PPIC [Statewide Survey finds that conservatives are more likely to express a desire to leave the state](#). Even a modest partisan imbalance in out-migration could gradually shift California's population leftward.

Sources: California Department of Finance Population Estimates and Population Projections; US Census Bureau Population Estimates; Decennial Censuses; American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2021.