Occasional Papers

The Demography of California Immigrants

Hans Johnson

Paper based on testimony before the
Little Hoover Commission Hearing
on Immigrant Integration
March 22, 2001

**Public
Policy
Institute *of*
California**

Preface

This paper documents a briefing given to the Little Hoover Commission to better inform the Commission about the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of immigrants in California. The paper begins with a brief summary of the presentation and then contains copies of the Powerpoint slides used in the briefing.

The research presented here is part of a much larger body of ongoing work on California demography and on immigrants and immigration that is being conducted by the Public Policy Institute of California. In addition to the Little Hoover Commission, this work should be of interest to others such as the California Department of Finance, the Employment Development Department, and others interested in California's large and growing immigrant population.

This briefing and Occasional Paper were prepared before 2000 Census data were available. Although the data presented in this paper are drawn from many sources, the author is solely responsible for the accuracy and content of this document.

Summary of Presentation

Demographic Context

The population of California is among the most diverse and complex in the world. No other developed region the size of California has undergone such rapid and tremendous population growth over the past several decades. As recently as 1950, California was home to only 10 million people, or about one out of every 15 United States residents. By 2000, California's population had more than tripled to almost 34 million people. Today, one out of every eight United States residents is a Californian. The California Department of Finance projects that by the year 2030 over 50 million people will reside in California.

California's population growth is unique and noteworthy, but equally remarkable is the nature and composition of that growth. As recently as 1970, almost 80 percent of the state's residents were non-Hispanic white. By 1998, that number had dropped to 52 percent, with Hispanics then comprising 30 percent of the state's population, Asians 11 percent, and African Americans 7 percent. Thus, in 1998, the minority population reached a point of near parity with the majority population. Indeed, the California Department of Finance projects that shortly after the turn of the century, no race/ethnic group will constitute a majority of the state's population. The 2000 Census might find that this has already occurred. If current patterns of immigration and fertility rates persist, by the year 2025 Hispanics will represent the single largest ethnic group in the state.

Over the past few decades, much if not most of California's population growth and increasing diversity can be attributed to large increases in immigration. To understand California's population, it is essential to understand its large immigrant population.

Demographic Characteristics of California's Immigrants

California's immigrant population is large, diverse, and increasing rapidly, growing from just over 1 million in 1950 to over 8 million by 1997. California has not only the greatest number of immigrants of any state, it has more than twice as many as the next leading state (New York, with 3.6 million immigrants in 1997). The share of California's population that consists of immigrants grew from 8.5 percent in 1960 to 25 percent in 1997. In the entire United States, immigrants comprised only 9.7 percent of the population in 1997.

California's immigrants are diverse, coming to the state from dozens of countries. In 1990, the state was home to at least 10,000 immigrants from each of 66 different countries. The largest single country of origin of immigrants to California is Mexico, yielding five times as many immigrants as the next leading country of origin, the Philippines. The Philippines, in turn, is the country of origin of twice as many immigrants as the next leading countries: El Salvador and Vietnam.

Although immigrants in California are concentrated in the state's largest urban areas, particularly Los Angeles, many live in other areas of the state, including rural areas. The presence of sizable numbers of immigrants throughout the state is in direct contrast to geographic distributions in other states. For example, in New York, immigrants are concentrated in the New York City metropolitan area, with very small populations in the rest of the state; in Illinois, the vast majority of immigrants live in the Chicago area.

Most immigrants in California are not citizens of the United States. In 1990 in California, only 43 percent of the adults who had lived in the United States at least five years had naturalized. Naturalization rates vary tremendously by country of origin, with immigrants from Italy, Ireland, Germany, Hong Kong, and the Philippines all having naturalization rates in excess of 70 percent (in 1990), and immigrants from Nicaragua, Mexico, Cambodia, Guatemala, Laos, and El Salvador all having naturalization rates of less than 30 percent. Since 1990, naturalization rates have risen substantially for Mexican immigrants in California. This increase can be attributed to INS efforts to encourage citizenship, amnesty which legalized the status of many formerly unauthorized immigrants, and a response to Proposition 187, which sought to deny social services to illegal immigrants.

Socioeconomic Characteristics of California's Immigrants

Immigrants in California tend to be less educated and to have lower incomes than other residents of the state. However, a substantial proportion are college graduates, and labor force participation rates tend to be quite high. Many of the socioeconomic measures vary greatly by country of origin. Proficiency in English varies tremendously by generation, with first generation immigrants tending to have low rates of proficiency and second generation U.S born descendants of immigrants having high levels of proficiency.

In general, immigrants from Asia, Canada, and Europe have relatively high levels of education and income. Southeast Asians are a notable exception. One of the fastest growing groups of immigrants in California in the 1980s, most Southeast Asians came to the United States as refugees of the Vietnam War. They have among the lowest levels of educational attainment and among the lowest incomes of any immigrant group in California. For example, in 1990 only about 5 percent of immigrants from Laos and Cambodia had graduated from college, compared to over 60 percent of immigrants from Taiwan and India.

Immigrants from Latin America also tend to be poorly educated and to earn low wages. Still, their labor force participation rates are quite high. Indeed, the working poor in California are likely to be immigrants from Latin America. About 90 percent of male immigrants ages 25 to 54 from Latin America are in the labor force. Despite their high levels of labor force participation and employment, over 25 percent of Mexican immigrants lived at or below the poverty level in 1990.

Conclusion

To understand the opportunities and challenges facing immigrants in California, it is first necessary to understand that they are not a monolithic group. They originate from a diverse set of countries and come to the United States with a diverse set of skills. The geographic spread of immigrants to almost every part of California suggests that the successful integration of immigrants is not a localized issue but a statewide concern. In this testimony, I present an array of statistics and measures that illustrate the diversity of immigrants in the state and point out some of the challenges to their successful integration. The substantial population of immigrants in California means that the future of immigrants and their descendants will largely determine the future of California.

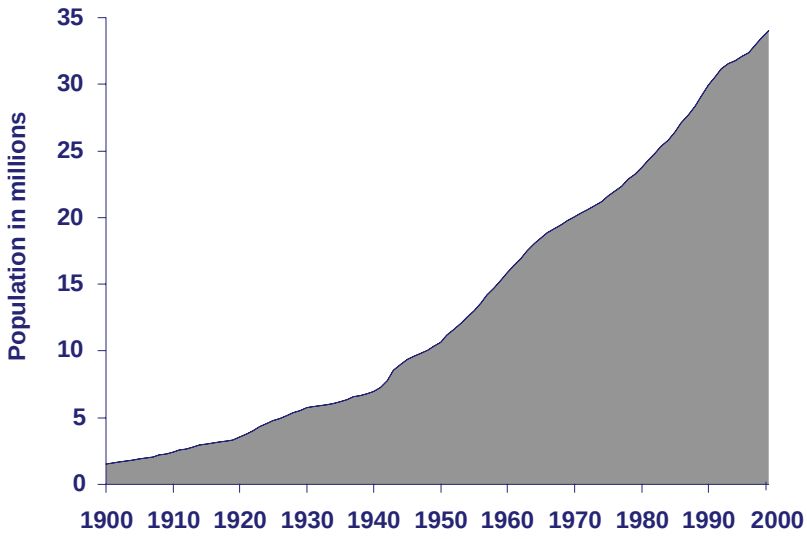
The Demography of California's Immigrants

Hans Johnson
Public Policy Institute of California

Outline

- **The California Context**
- **Demographic Characteristics**
- **Socioeconomic Characteristics**

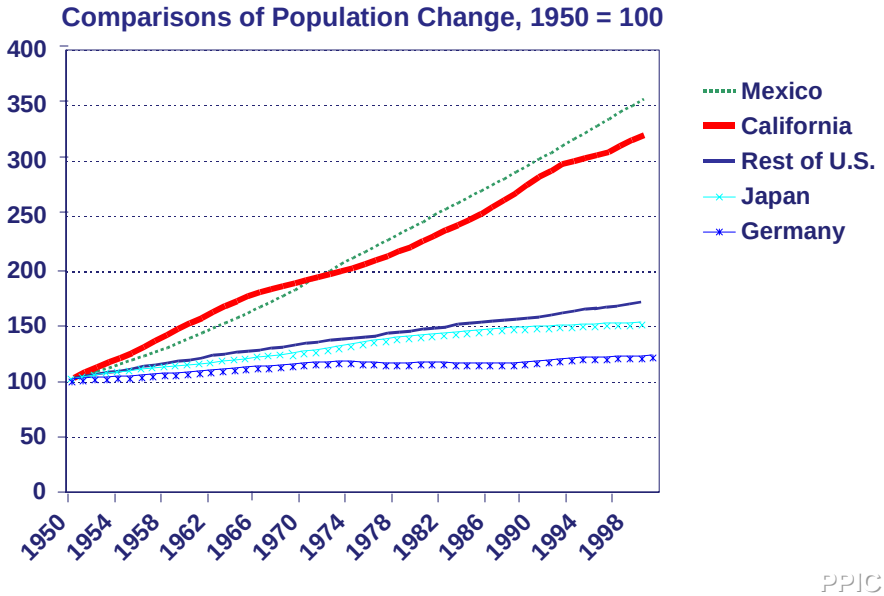
California Has Experienced Tremendous Population Growth



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, California Department of Finance

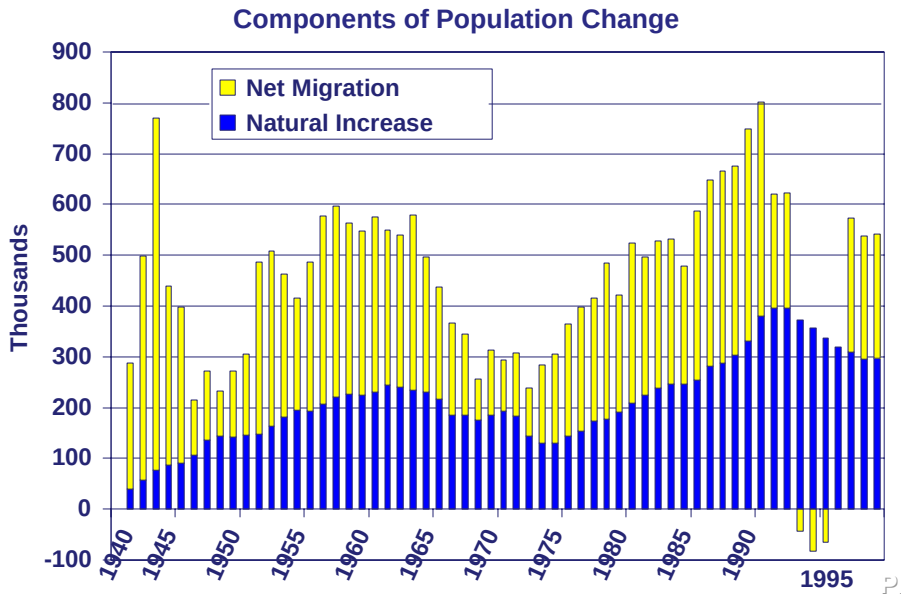
PPIC 3

California's Growth is Unique for a Developed Region



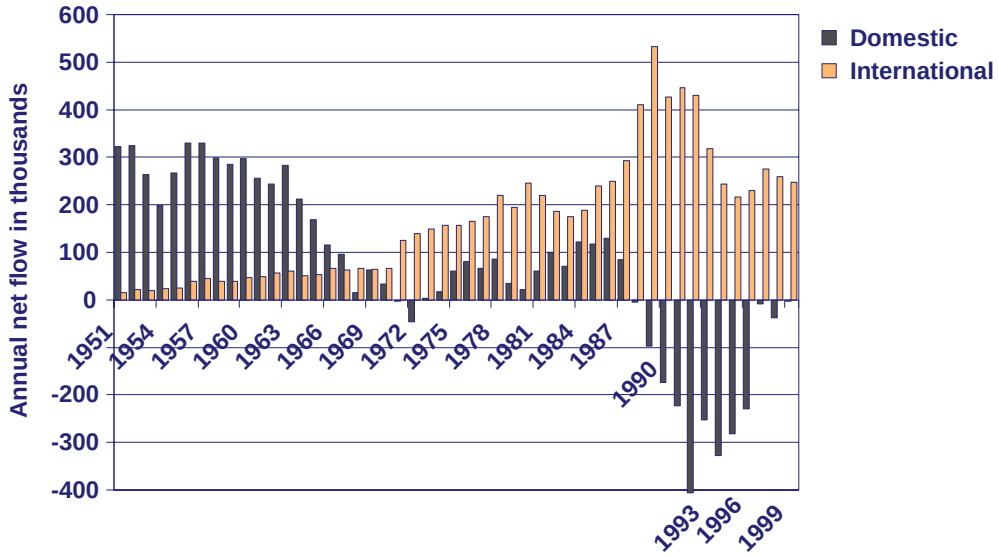
PPIC 4

Source of Population Growth Has Changed



PPIC 5

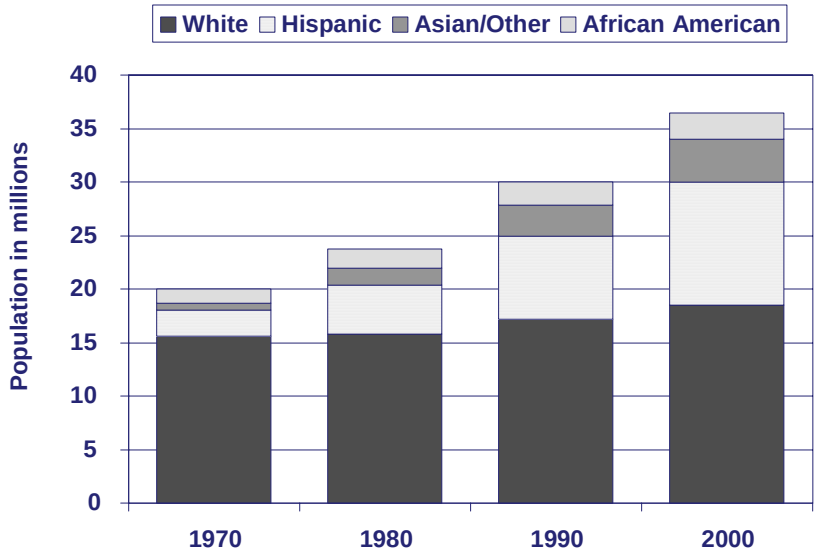
Immigration Now More Important Than Domestic Migration



Source: California Department of Finance, unofficial estimates to 1980; Public Policy Institute of California, 1980-1993; DOF 1993-1999, with CB for international migration

PPIC 6

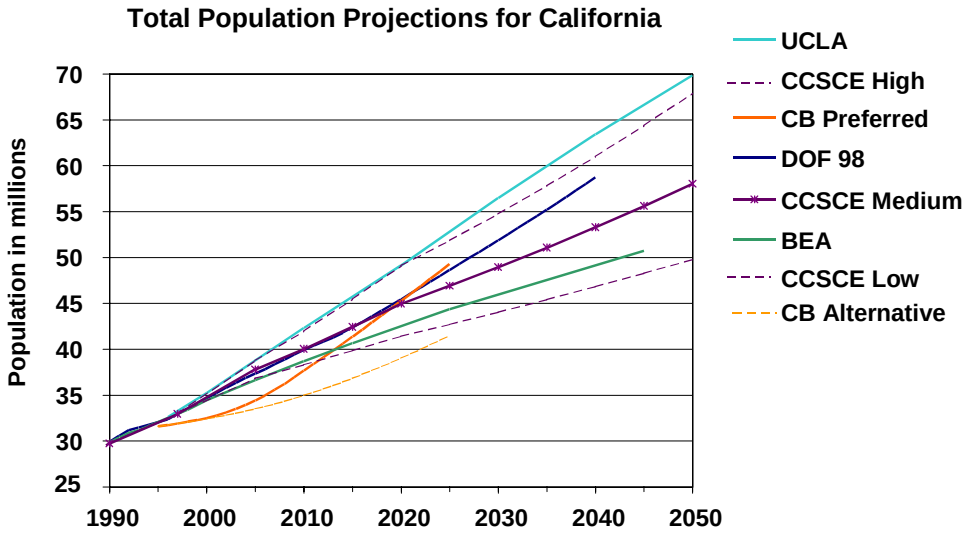
Hispanic and Asian Populations Have Grown Rapidly



Source: California Department of Finance

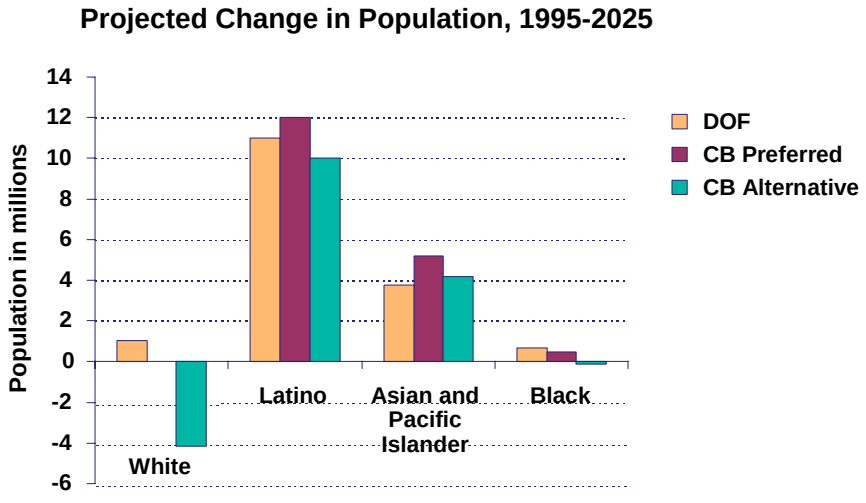
PPIC 7

Projections for California Diverge Widely



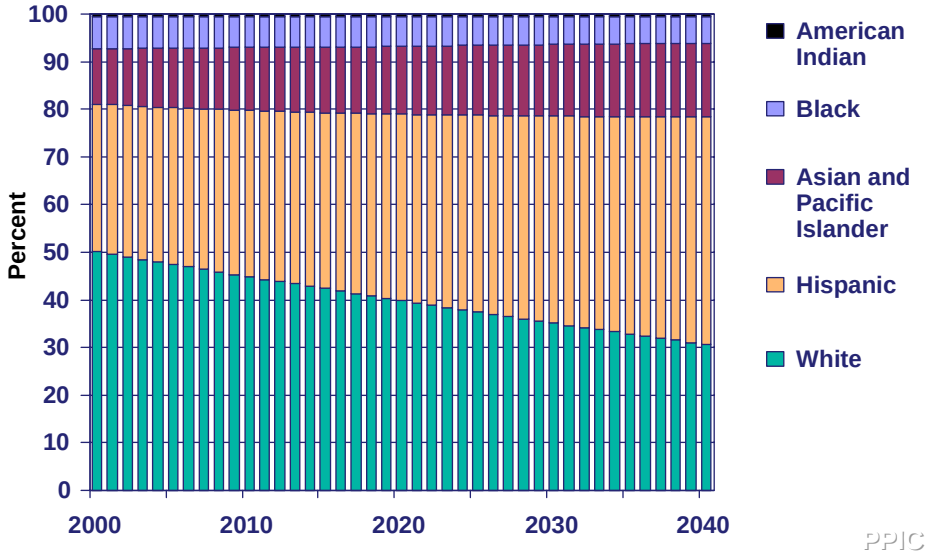
PPIC 8

Projections Agree That Latino Population Growth Will Be Rapid



PPIC 9

Hispanics Will Become Single Largest Ethnic Group



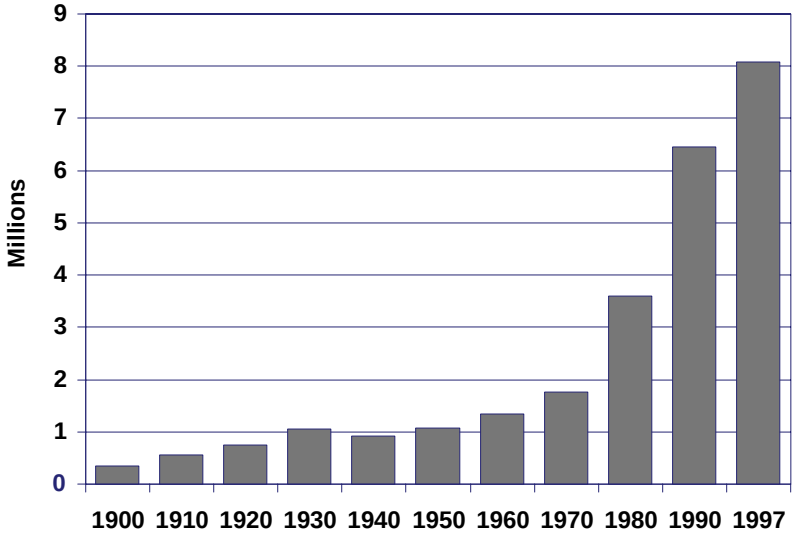
PPIC 10

Outline

- The California Context
- Demographic Characteristics
- Socioeconomic Characteristics

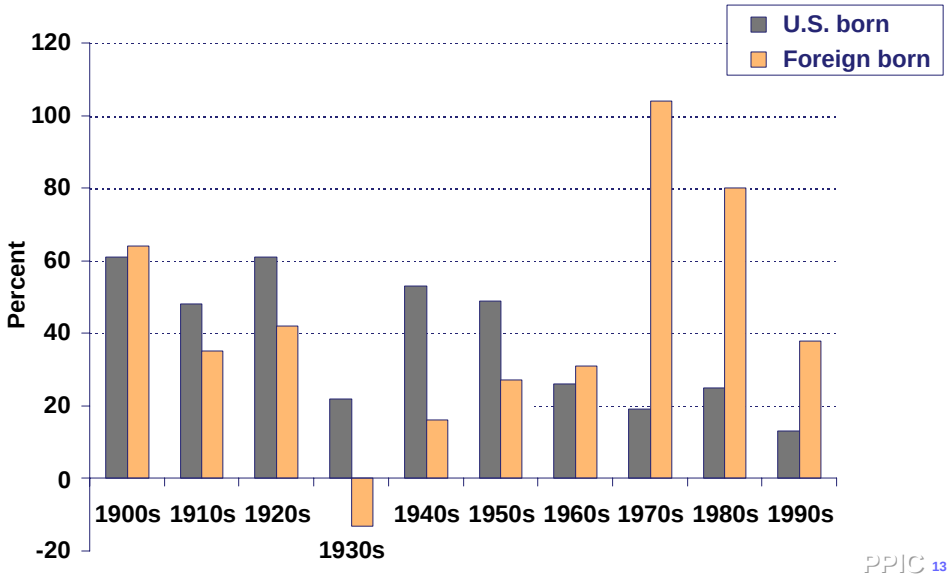
PPIC 11

Rapid Increase in the Foreign-Born Population



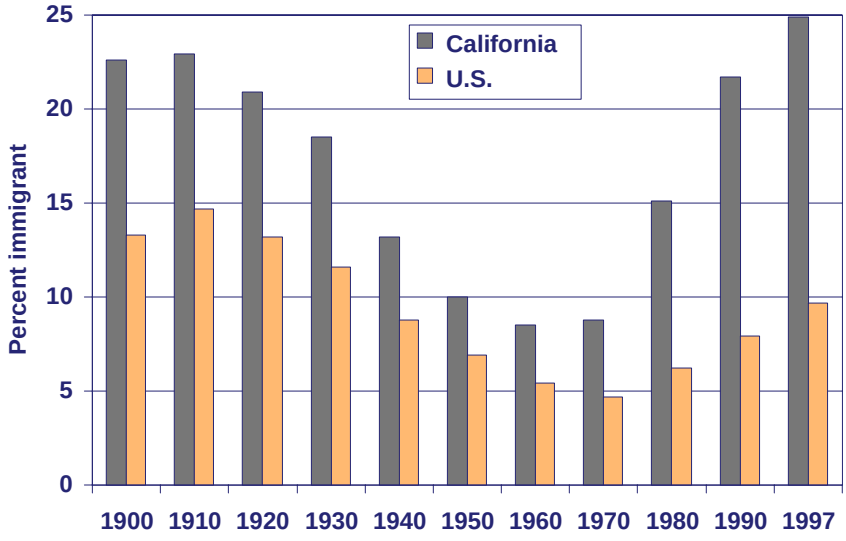
PPIC 12

Growth Rates by Decade



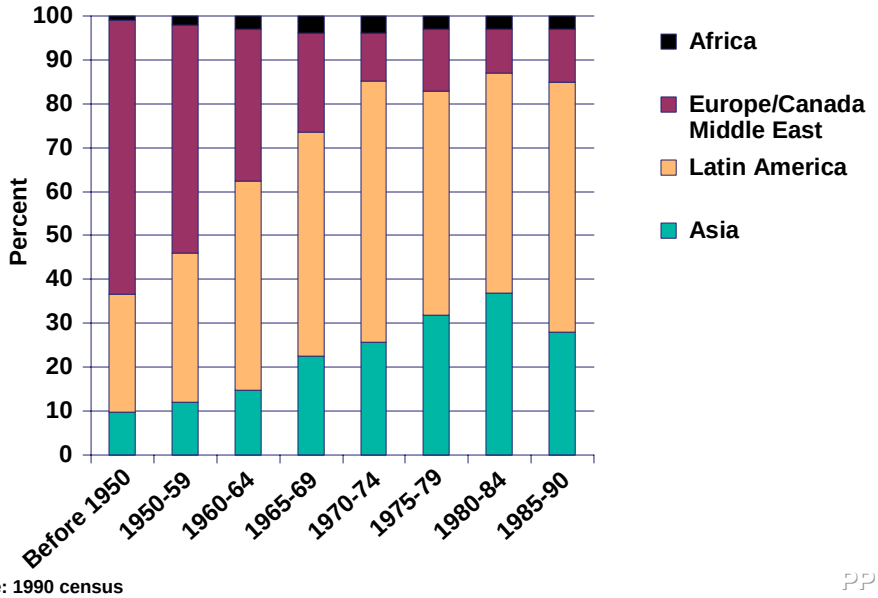
PPIC 13

Share of Immigrants Exceeds Levels Seen in Early 1900s



PPIC 14

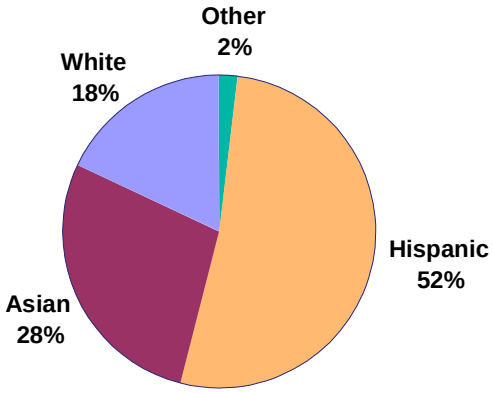
Countries of Origin Have Changed



Source: 1990 census

PPIC 15

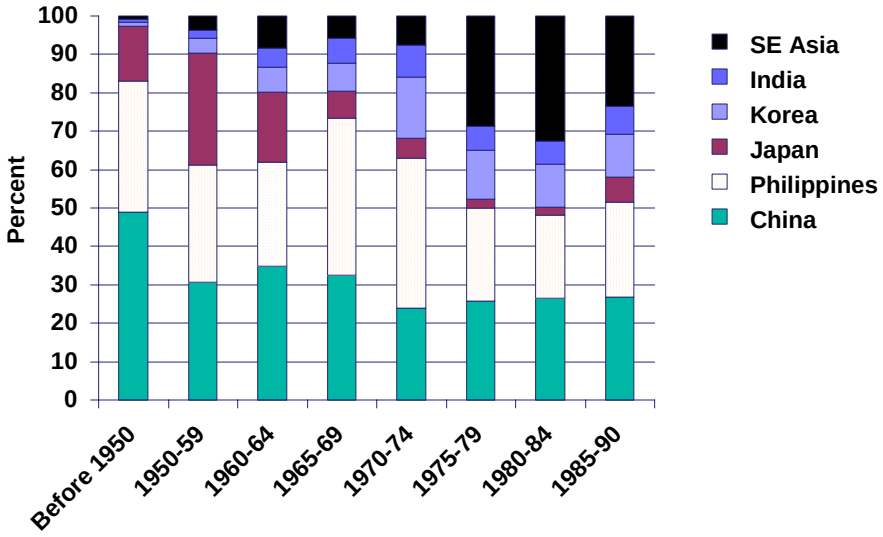
Eight in Ten Immigrants Are Asian or Hispanic



Source: 1990 census

PPIC 16

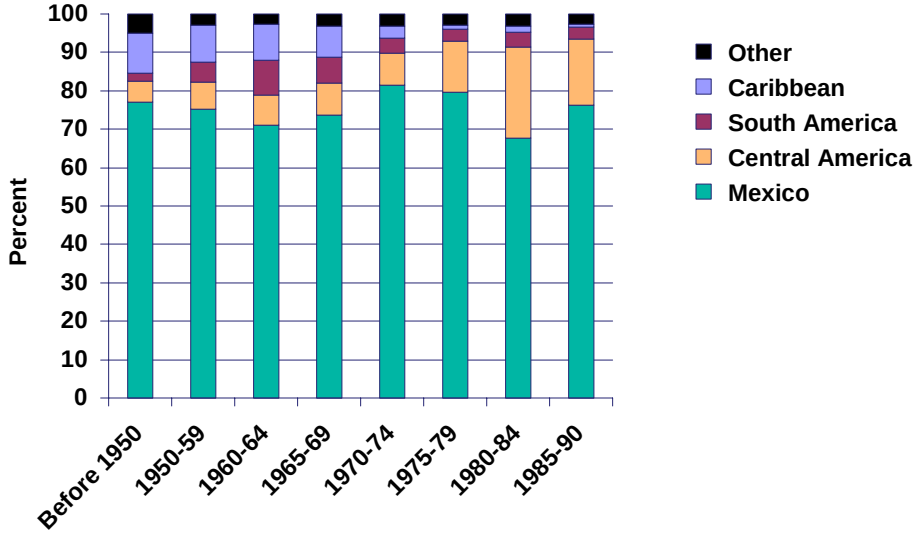
Asian Countries of Origin Have Changed



Source: 1990 census

PPIC 17

Mexico Remains Leading Origin for Latin American Immigrants



Source: 1990 census

PPIC 18

Mexico is the Leading Source of Immigrants

Mexico..... 2,524,000
Philippines..... 525,000
El Salvador..... 282,240
Vietnam..... 276,000
China..... 216,000
Korea..... 179,000
Canada..... 165,000
Germany..... 156,000
United Kingdom.. 150,000
Guatemala.....137,000

Source: 1990 Census

PPIC 19

Immigrants Come to California from Dozens of Countries

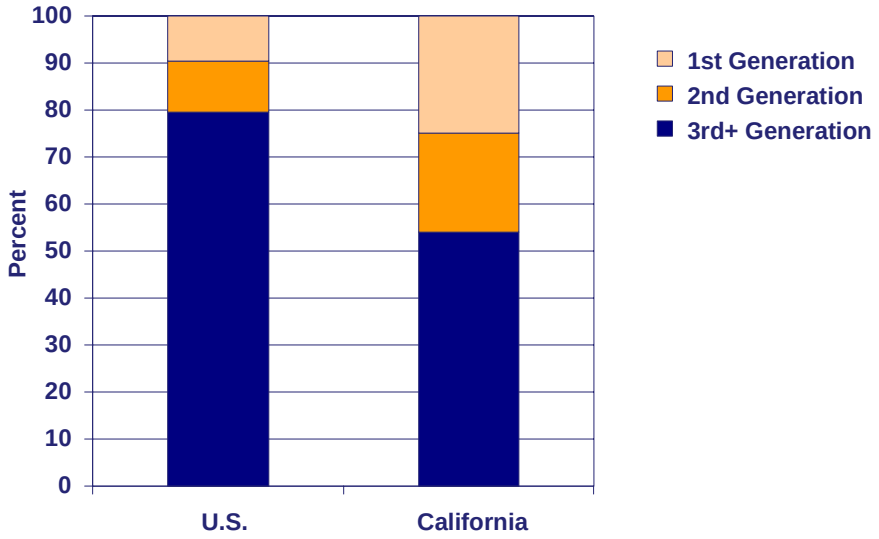
Countries of origin for places with at least 10,000 immigrants in California

Mexico	Philippines	El Salvador	Vietnam	China
Korea	Canada	Germany	England	Guatemala
Japan	Iran	Taiwan	India	USSR
Hong Kong	Laos	Cambodia	Cuba	Nicaragua
Italy	Australia	Thailand	Peru	France
Lebanon	Colombia	Poland	Portugal	Netherlands
Indonesia	Israel	Argentina	Honduras	Scotland
Romania	Egypt	Hungry	Ecuador	Ireland
Yugoslavia	Panama	Pakistan	Spain	Fiji
Belize	Chile	Syria	Greece	Brazil
Australia	Iraq	Czech.	Denmark	Afghan.
Austria	Turkey	Burma	Costa Rica	Sweden
Switzerland	Jamaica	Azores		

Source: 1990 Census

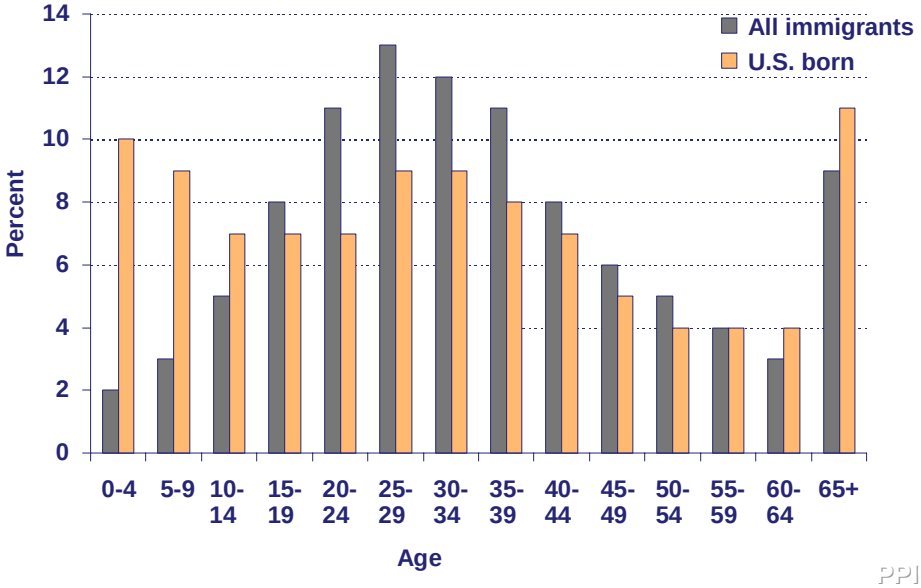
PPIC 20

Population by Immigrant Generation, 1997



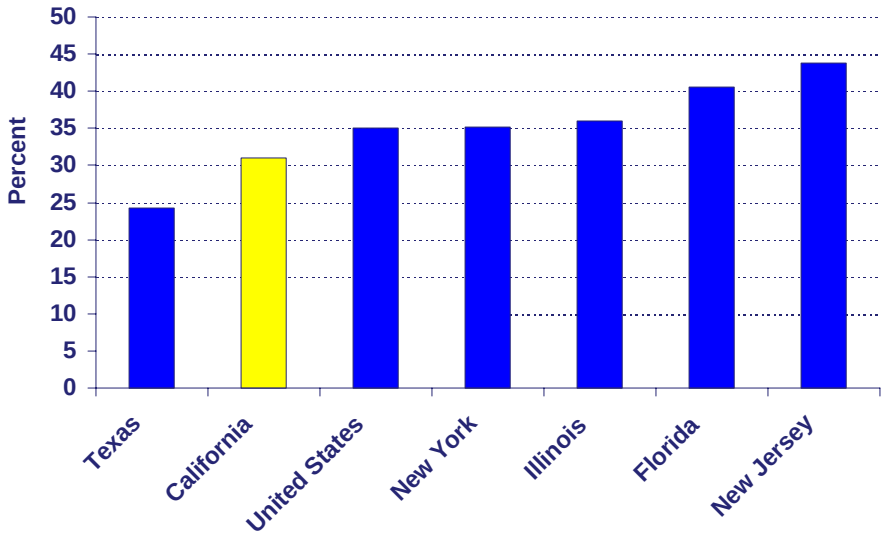
PPIC 21

Immigrants are Concentrated in Young Adult Age Groups



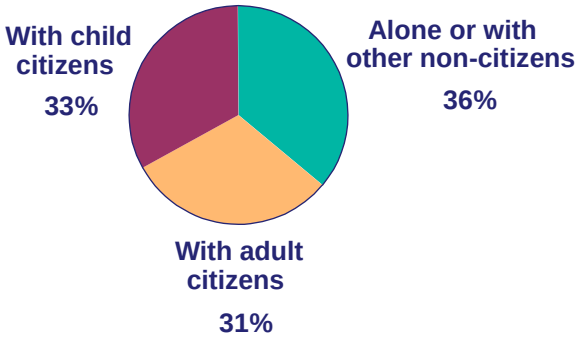
PPIC 22

Percentage of Immigrants Naturalized



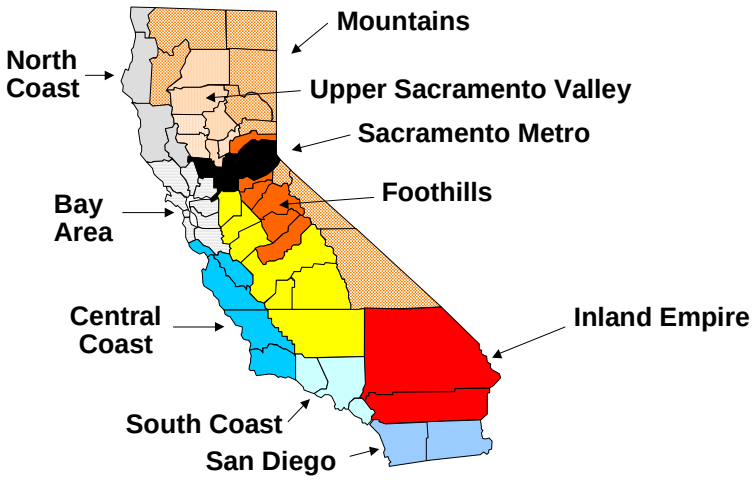
PPIC 23

Living Arrangements of Non-Citizen Immigrants in California, 1990



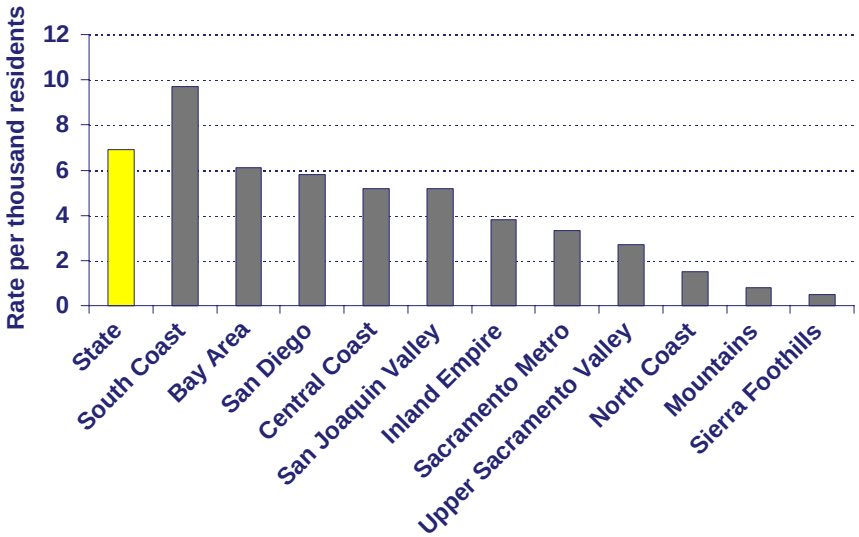
PPIC 24

Regional Definitions



PPIC 25

Most Regions Receive Substantial Flows of Immigrants



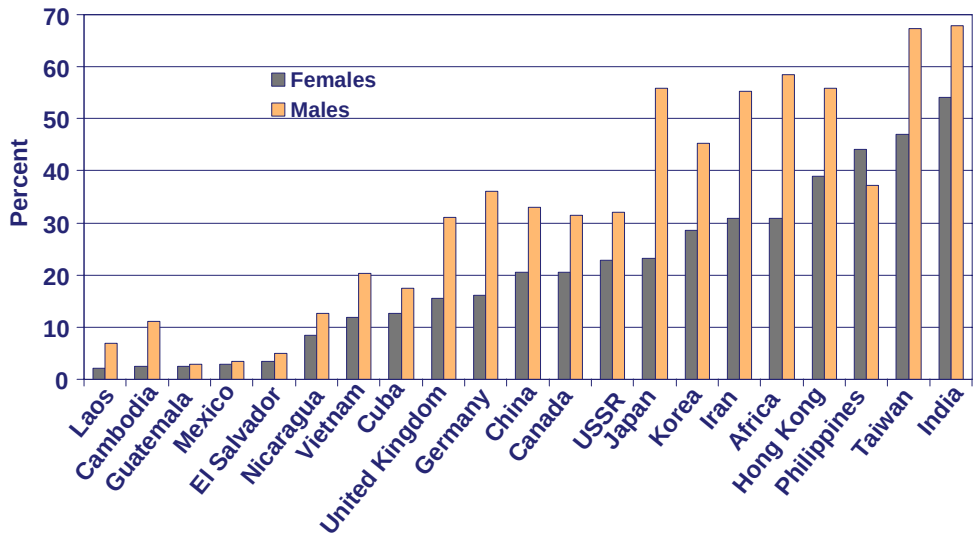
PPIC 26

Outline

- The California Context
- Demographic Characteristics
- Socioeconomic Characteristics
  - Education
  - Labor force
  - Poverty

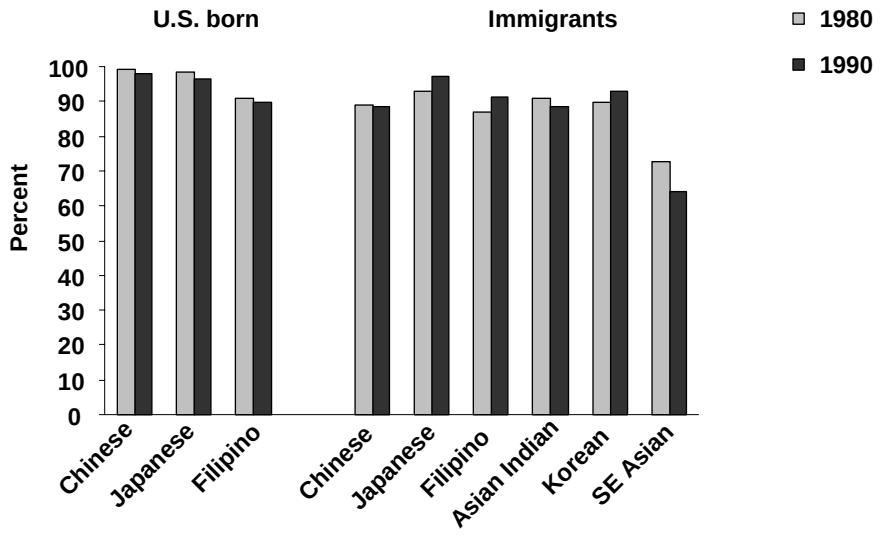
PPIC 27

Percentage of College Graduates Among Adult Immigrants



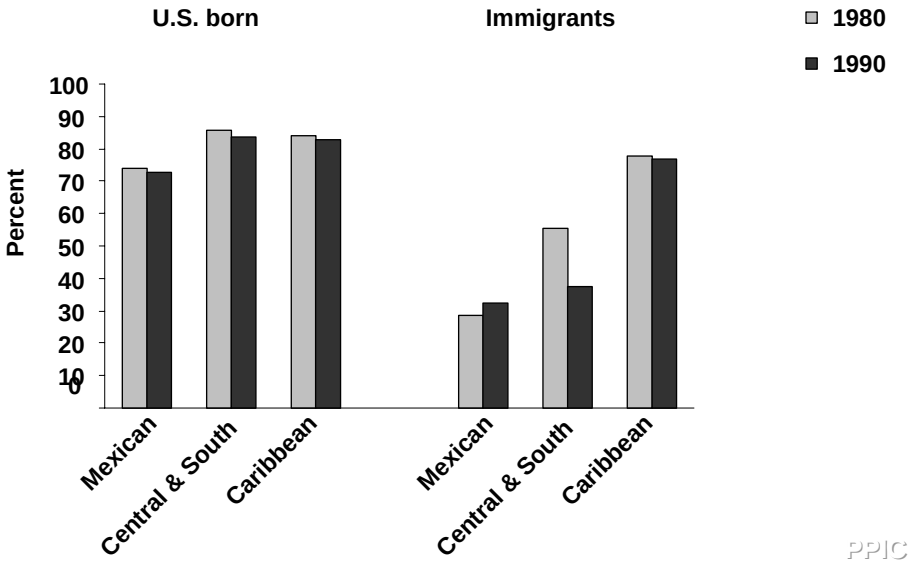
PPIC 28

H.S. Completion Rates of Asians, Ages 25-29, by Ethnicity & Immigrant Status



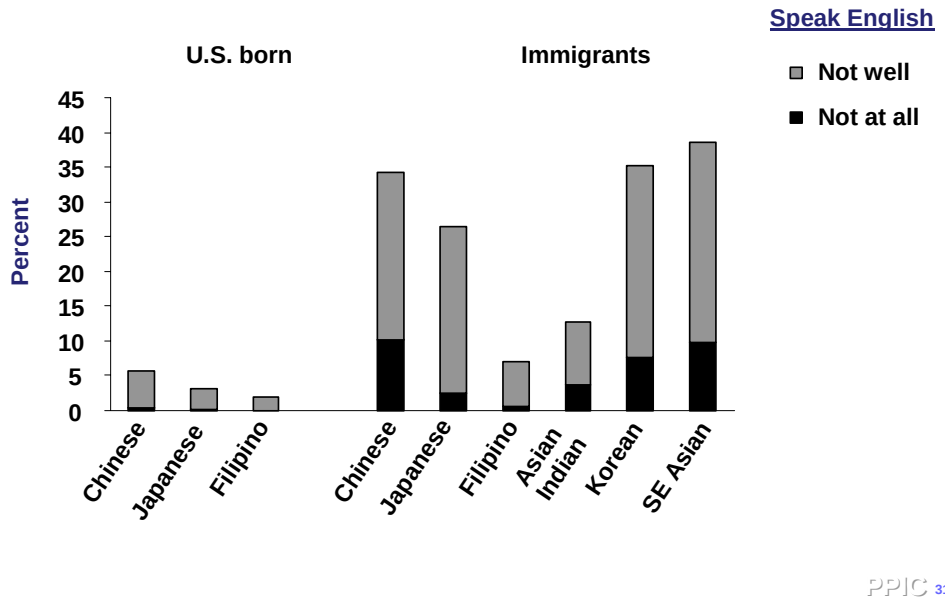
PPIC 29

H.S. Completion Rates of Hispanics, Ages 25-29, by Subgroup & Immigrant Status



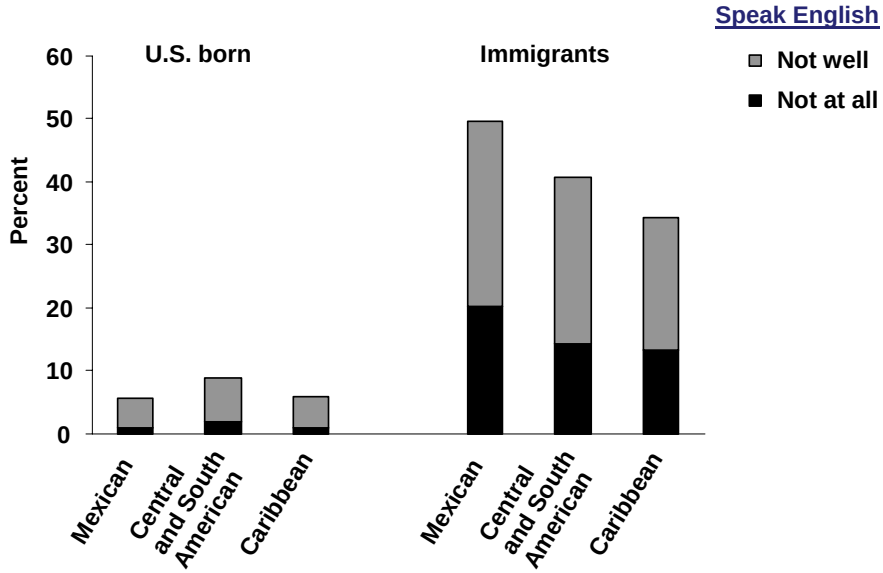
PPIC 30

English Language Ability, Asians, Age 5 and Older, 1990



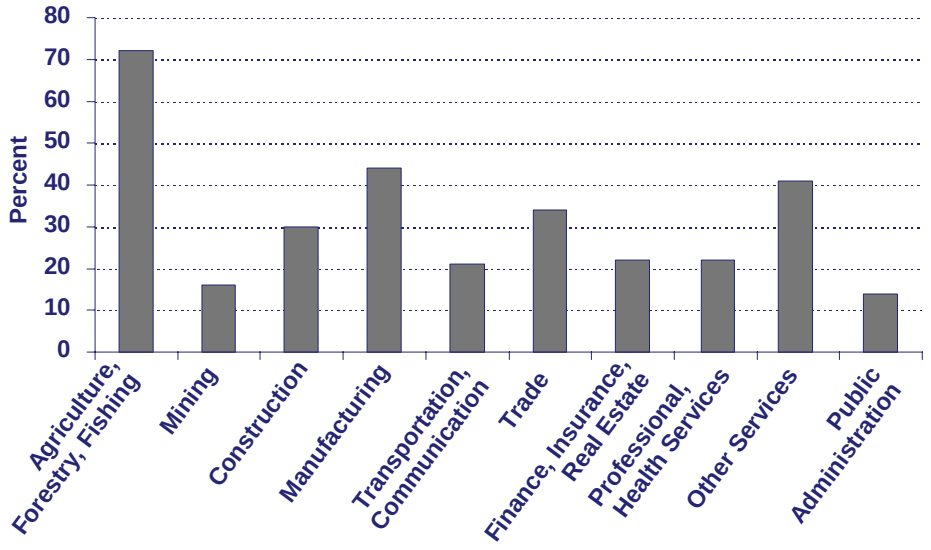
PPIC 31

English Language Ability, Hispanics, Age 5 and Older, 1990



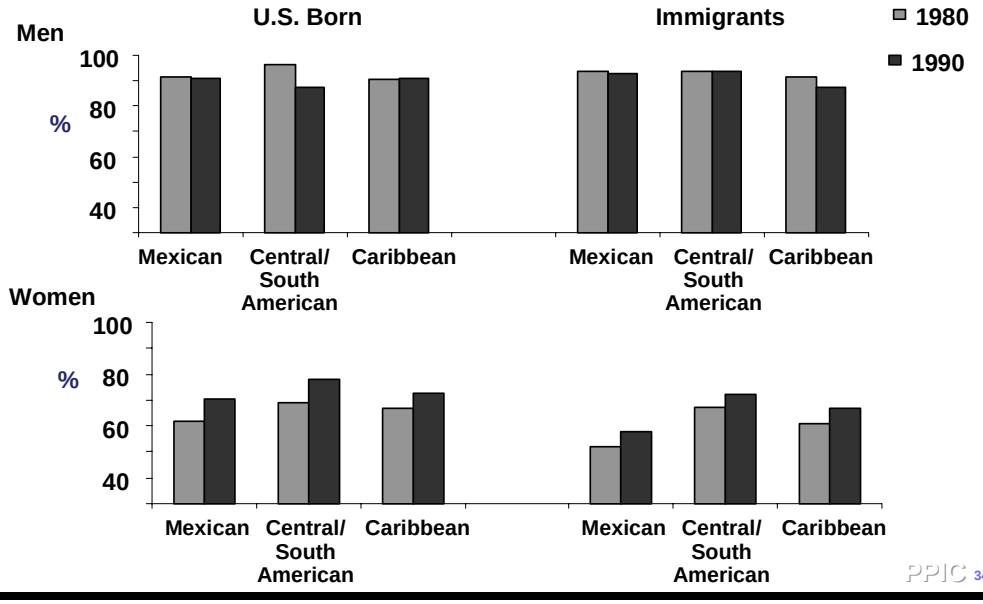
PPIC 32

Immigrants as Share of Labor Force by Industry, 1990



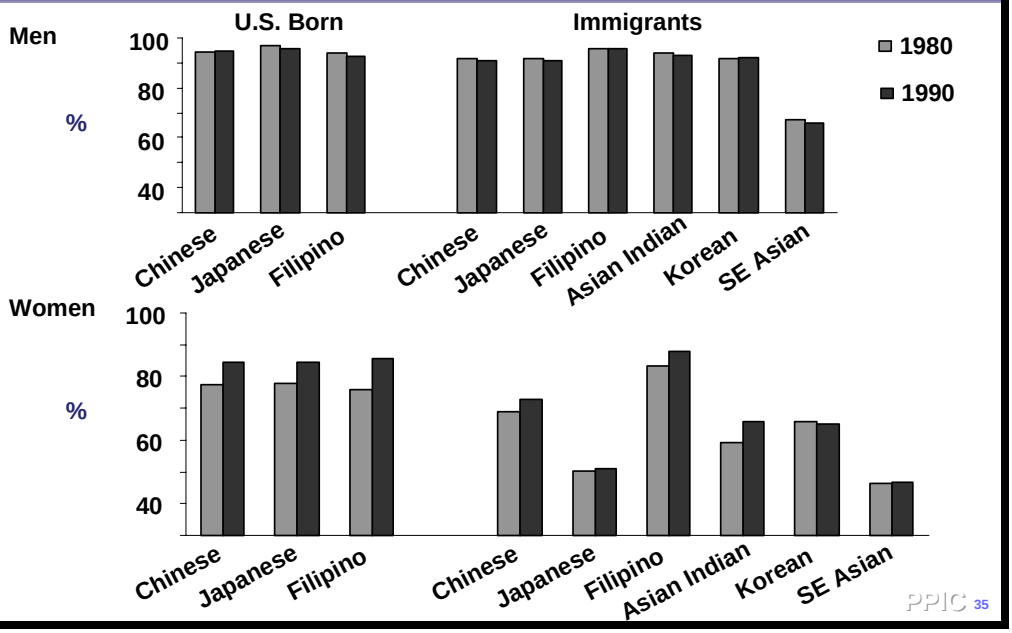
PPIC 33

Labor Force Participation Rates, Hispanics, Ages 25-54, by Subgroup/Immigrant Status



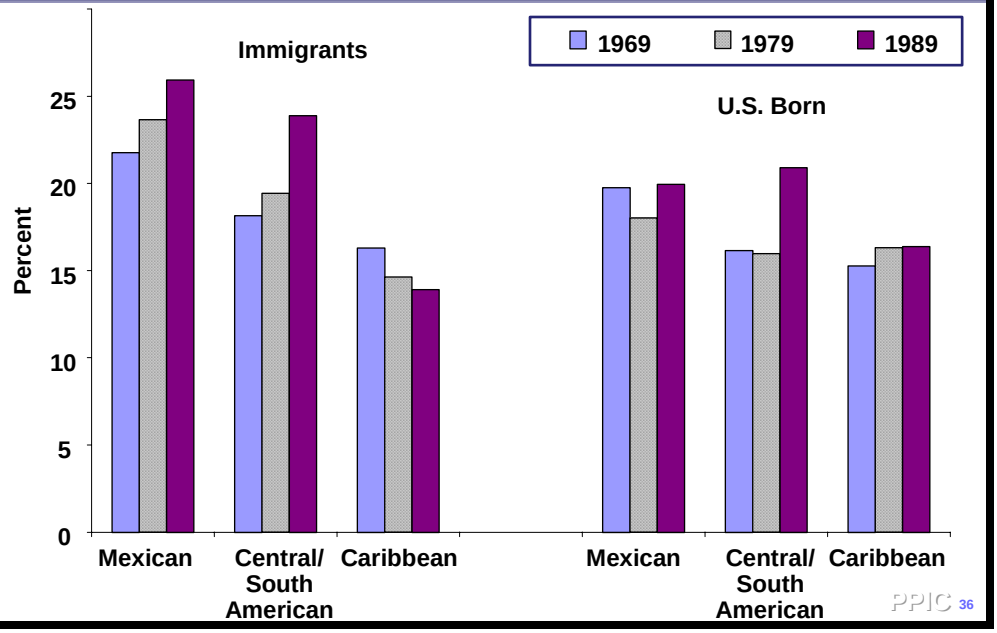
PPIC 34

Labor Force Participation Rates, Asians, Ages 25-54, by Ethnicity/Immigrant Status



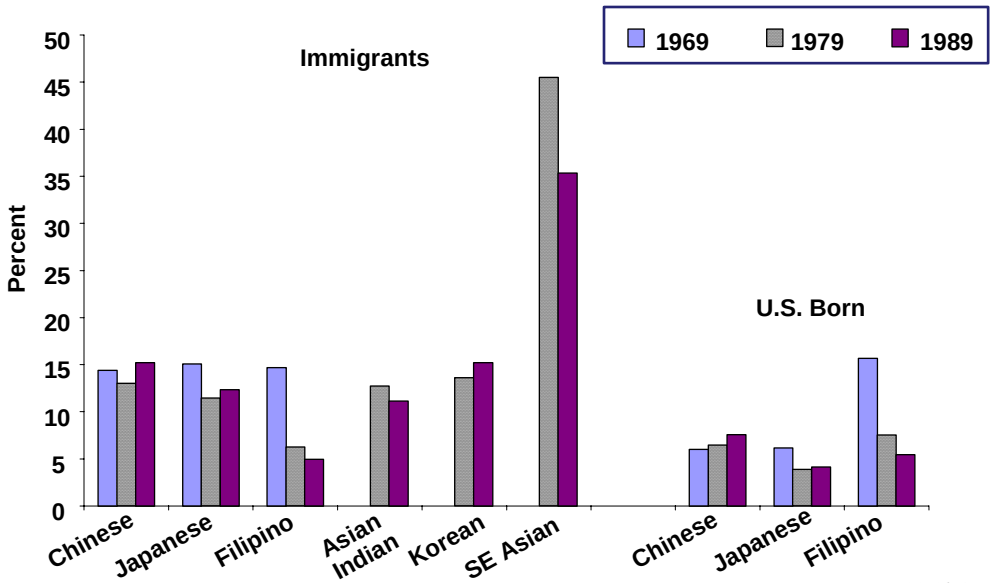
PPIC 35

Poverty Rates for Individuals in Selected Hispanic Groups



PPIC 36

Poverty Rates for Individuals in Selected Asian Groups



PPIC 37

Summary

- Immigrants are a large and growing population in California
- California's immigrants are diverse
- California's future depends on successful integration of immigrants and their children

PPIC 38