

California's Population

Hans Johnson, Eric McGhee, and Marisol Cuellar Mejia

MARCH 2021

➤ **One in eight US residents lives in California.**

With almost 40 million people (according to 2020 estimates), California is the nation's most populous state—its population is much larger than that of second-place Texas (29 million) and third-place Florida (22 million). California's population is projected to reach 45 million people by 2050.

➤ **California's population growth has slowed dramatically in recent decades.**

Between 1900 and 2000, California's population skyrocketed from fewer than 2 million people to 34 million, a growth rate that was much higher than that of the rest of the United States. Over the past 20 years, California has experienced its slowest rates of growth ever recorded, and growth has been especially stagnant this decade. According to estimates by the California Department of Finance, California's population grew by 6.5% (or 2.4 million) from 2010 to 2020, slower than the rate of growth in the rest of the United States (6.7%). In the past year, growth has essentially ground to a halt (0.05% gain).

➤ **Domestic migration out of California has accelerated.**

From 2010 to 2020, 1.3 million more people left California for other states than came to California from other states. The flow out of the state was especially stark in the last two years, with a net loss of almost 500,000 people. Meanwhile, international migration has slowed but remains a strong source of population growth, with a net inflow of 1.5 million in the past decade. Natural increase—the difference between births and deaths—added 2.3 million residents. But birth rates are at record lows and the number of deaths is increasing as the population ages. The COVID-19 pandemic also led to a notable rise in deaths in the past year.

➤ **California's population is diverse.**

No race or ethnic group constitutes a majority of California's population: 39% of state residents are Latino, 36% are white, 15% are Asian or Pacific Islander, 6% are African American, fewer than 1% are Native American or Alaska Natives, and 3% are multiracial or other, according to the 2019 American Community Survey. Latinos surpassed whites as the state's single largest ethnic group in 2014.

➤ **More than 10 million Californians are immigrants.**

According to 2019 estimates, 27% (or 10.6 million) of Californians are foreign born—this share is larger than that of any other state (New Jersey is second with 23%) and more than double the share in the rest of the nation (12%). The leading countries of origin for California immigrants are Mexico (3.9 million), China and Taiwan (974,000), the Philippines (859,000), Vietnam (539,000), India (513,000), El Salvador (454,000), Korea (317,000), Guatemala (309,000), and Iran (214,000). In recent years, immigration from Asia has outpaced immigration from Latin America by a two-to-one margin.

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

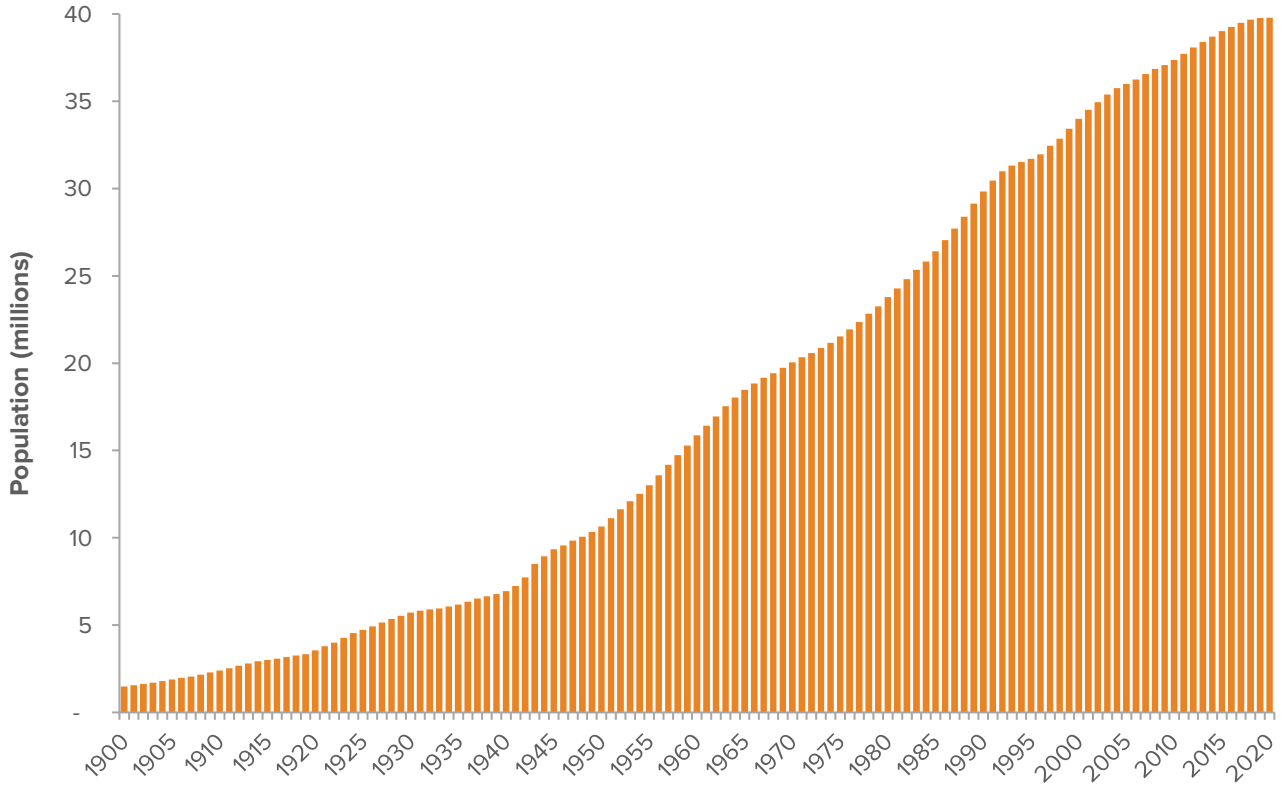
California's population is aging along with the baby boomers; by 2030, about one in five Californians will be 65 or older. But the state's population is slightly younger than that of the rest of the nation: according to 2019 Census Bureau estimates, the median age in California is 37.0, compared to 38.5 for the entire country. California has the seventh-youngest population in the US (Utah has the youngest).

➤ **Californians may have been undercounted in the 2020 Census.**

The Census Bureau's decennial population count will have far-reaching consequences for California's political representation and federal funding. Three in four Californians belong to one or more hard-to-count groups: children, young men, Latino and African American residents, and renters. Noncitizens may also have been particularly reluctant to participate, given the Trump administration's actions to curtail immigration and its attempt to add a citizenship question to the census form. The pandemic further upended outreach efforts and affected in-person follow-ups by census workers. Parts of the final count will become available starting in April 2021, but it will take longer to fully discern how disruptions may have affected the count's accuracy.

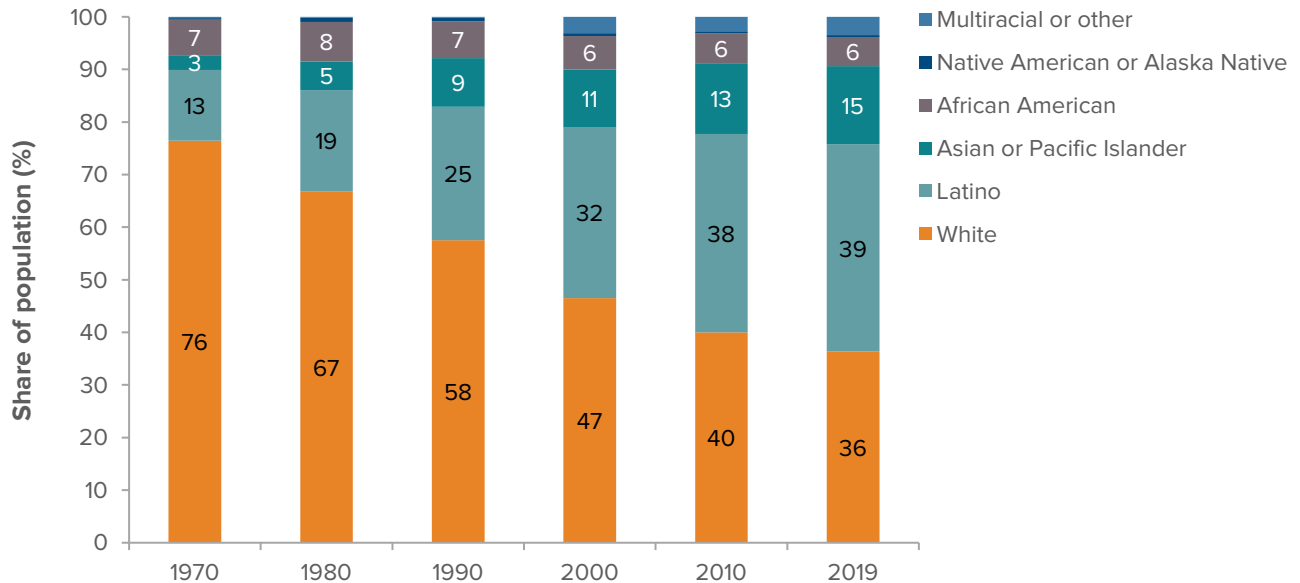


California's population skyrocketed in the 20th century but growth has slowed in recent decades



Source: California Department of Finance estimates.

California's population is increasingly diverse



Source: IPUMS 1970–2000, 1% versions of each decennial census, including the 1970 Form 1 metro sample. American Community Survey 2019.

Sources: California Department of Finance estimates and projections; US Census Bureau estimates; decennial censuses; American Community Survey.

Contact: johnson@ppic.org, mcghee@ppic.org, cuellar@ppic.org

