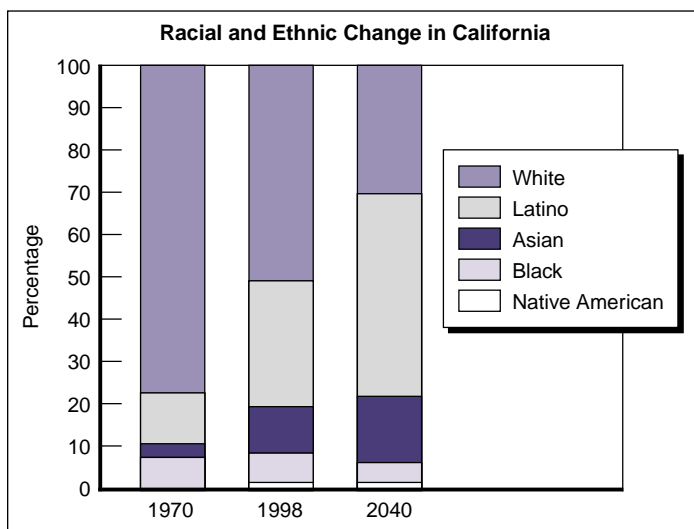


## *Of One Mind or Many? Racial and Ethnic Attitudes in California*

California's population is undergoing dramatic racial and ethnic change as it evolves from a largely white state to one with a much more diverse population. By the year 2020, Latinos and Asians are expected to account for half of the state's population.

As racial and ethnic minorities grow in number, their effect on the social, economic, and political context of the state is likely to become more pronounced. Hence, it is important to gain a better understanding of minority interests and concerns. In *Finding Common Ground: Racial and Ethnic Attitudes in California*, Zoltan Hajnal and Mark Baldassare answer a number of critical questions about California's racial and ethnic groups through an analysis of their social, political, and economic attitudes. Using data from ten PPIC Statewide Surveys that interviewed a total of 20,000 adults between April 1998 and May 2000, the authors examine the implications of race and ethnicity across four domains: race and ethnic relations, policy preferences, political orientation, and socioeconomic well-being.



*By 2040, whites are expected to represent only one-third of the population. Two in three Californians will be Latino, Asian, or black.*

### *Race and Ethnic Relations*

The surveys show that most Californians are well aware of the changes occurring in the racial and ethnic composition of the state and that most believe that race relations are going well in their regions. However, there are sharp disagreements among racial and ethnic groups when it comes to specific race-based policies such as eliminating affirmative action, denying social services to illegal immigrants, and dismantling bilingual education—three divisive issues that were brought to the fore through the initiative process. For example, only 27 percent of whites say that they would like to see affirmative action programs continued, compared to 49 percent of Asians, 66 percent of Latinos, and 78 percent of blacks. When it comes to illegal immigration from Mexico, 91 percent of whites consider it a problem, compared to 86 percent of blacks, 80 percent of Asians, and 67 percent of Latinos. When asked whether they thought local school districts should be able to decide whether to keep their bilingual education programs, only 56 percent of whites said yes, compared to 65 percent of Latinos, 69 percent of Asians, and 71 percent of blacks.

### *Policy Preferences*

Aside from race-based policies such as those discussed above, Asians, blacks, Latinos, and whites agree more often than not on a wide range of issues. All four groups tend to name education, crime, and the economy as the state's most critical policy arenas. There is also some real agreement on solutions to these problems. However, there is a distinct racial ordering on many issues. Blacks tend to be the most critical of current conditions. They often see big problems and want to spend more than others to address these problems. The views of Latinos tend to be similar to those of blacks, although somewhat more moderate. Whites and Asians often see many of the same problems as blacks and Latinos but are generally a little less willing to support increased spending to alleviate the problems. For example,

when asked if they thought the current level of state funding for local public schools was enough, blacks (88%) and Latinos (73%) were a little more likely than Asians (71%) and whites (68%) to say the funding should be increased.

### ***Political Orientation***

Analysis of the data on political interest and participation revealed a sharp divide between Asians and Latinos on the one hand and blacks and whites on the other. Asians and Latinos are not as politically engaged as others. Eighty-seven percent of whites and 84 percent of blacks say that they are registered to vote, compared to 65 percent of Asians and 62 percent of Latinos. There are also significant differences in political party affiliation. Among registered voters, Democrats outnumber Republicans by a large margin among blacks (79% to 7%) and Latinos (61% to 21%) and by a smaller margin among Asians (40% to 31%). Among whites, Republicans narrowly outnumber Democrats (44% to 39%). On most other political indicators, including trust in government and performance ratings of elected officials, racial and ethnic differences are modest.

### ***Socioeconomic Well-Being***

There are large differences between racial and ethnic groups in terms of their socioeconomic well-being. Two-thirds of Latinos (67%) and a majority of blacks (57%) report having annual household incomes of less than \$40,000 a year, whereas only one-third of Asians (36%) and whites (37%) fall into this income category. A similar racial/ethnic divide exists in education. One-quarter of Latinos report that they do not have a high school diploma, compared to 9 percent of blacks, 5 percent of whites, and 3 percent of Asians. In another stark contrast, many Asians (58%) and whites (43%) have college degrees, compared to 32 percent of blacks and 17 percent of Latinos. Latinos also lag far behind every other group in important measures of participation in the “new economy”—computer and Internet use. Latinos (61%) are less likely than others, especially Asian Americans (91%), to use computers. Moreover, only

39 percent of Latinos report ever going online to access the Internet or to send or receive e-mail, compared to 61 percent of blacks, 66 percent of whites, and 81 percent of Asians.

### ***Conclusions and Implications***

There are many promising similarities and, at the same time, some major differences in the attitudes and experiences of Asians, blacks, Latinos, and whites in California today. Overall, Californians are not deeply divided in their racial and ethnic attitudes, and most feel that race and ethnic relations are going well in their region. However, there are flash-points of strong disagreement, particularly when it comes to race-specific policies such as ending affirmative action.

The authors point to three areas of real concern for the future of California. First, the fact that Latinos today lag far behind in socioeconomic status and Internet use does not bode well for their future economic achievement. If Latinos are to compete and to improve their currently weak socioeconomic position, the digital divide will have to be closed. Second, the limited political interest and participation of Asians and Latinos means that these groups may have a difficult time gaining influence in the politics of the state. If these two immigrant groups are to have their voices counted equally, they will have to become much more politically engaged. Third, the more that explicit racial issues are at the center of the state's politics, the more likely it is that California will be a deeply divided state along racial and ethnic lines. Proposed programs and issues will have to be shaped very carefully if the divisiveness of past racial politics through the California initiative process is to be avoided.

The authors conclude by noting that careful and sensitive political leadership is critical as California becomes a more racially and ethnically diverse state. If Californians can avoid racial politics and, instead, focus their energies on basic public policy issues such as education, crime, the economy, and the environment, where similarities across racial and ethnic groups are common, then the future of race relations in the state will be more promising.

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*This research brief summarizes a report by Zoltan Hajnal and Mark Baldassare, Finding Common Ground: Racial and Ethnic Attitudes in California (2001, 90 pp., \$10.00, ISBN 1-58213-033-7). The report may be ordered by phone at (800) 232-5343 [U.S. mainland] or (415) 291-4400 [Canada, Hawaii, overseas]. A copy of the full text is also available on the Internet (www.ppic.org). The Public Policy Institute of California is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to independent, objective, nonpartisan research on economic, social, and political issues affecting California.*

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