

# Wealth in California

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## Wealth is higher in California than in the rest of the US.

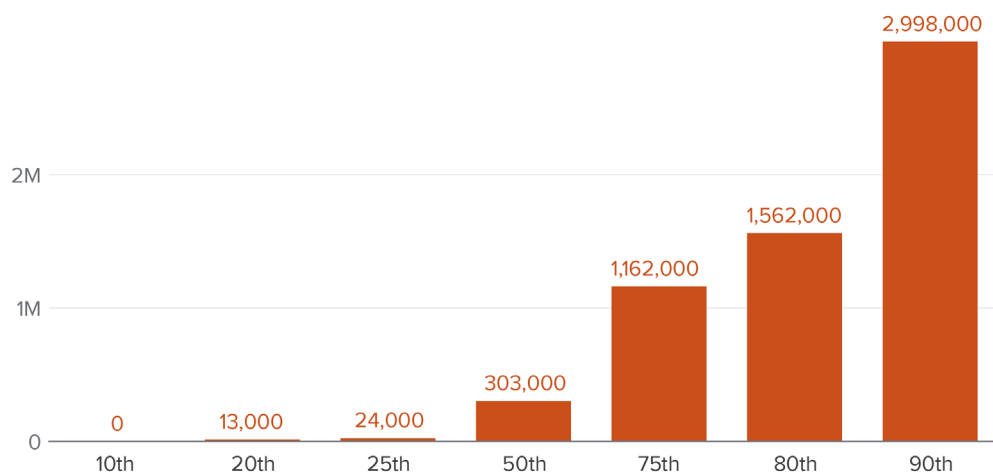
- ▶ Wealth, or net worth, refers to what you own minus what you owe. In California, the median household had more wealth (\$303,000) than those in the rest of the US overall (\$200,000) in 2023, the latest year for which we have data. Some individual states, including Hawaii and Washington, have median levels of wealth similar to or higher than California's.
- ▶ Home equity and retirement savings are typically the largest assets—worth \$572,000 and \$104,000 at the median for those who have them. Fewer Californians have home equity (51%) or retirement accounts (62%) than checking and savings accounts (94%) or vehicle equity (84%).
- ▶ California households are most likely to have credit card debt (41%) when it comes to borrowing not connected to homes, vehicles, and other property; some have education or medical (and other) debt (17% and 6%). However, education debt has the highest dollar value (\$26,000 at the median among those with any).

## High net worth households have substantially more wealth than low net worth households.

- ▶ The wealthiest 10% of California households have net worth over \$2.9 million—with at least a few hundred households having wealth that tops \$1 billion. High net worth households tend to have a variety of assets, and unlike others, the majority in the top quarter have financial investments (67%) or business, rental, and real estate equity (50%).
- ▶ The bottom quarter of households have less than \$24,000 in wealth; about 3 in 10 have debts that outweigh their assets. In this quarter, every type of asset is less common; only 2% own homes and 27% have retirement accounts. Six in ten (57%) hold unsecured debt, with education debt most prevalent (24%).
- ▶ Those near the top of the wealth distribution (80th percentile; \$1.6 million) have net worth 124 times more than those near the bottom (20th percentile; \$13,000). This difference is higher than in the rest of the country, where the 80th percentile is 99 times the 20th, and higher than [income inequality](#) in California.
- ▶ Higher wealth is typically connected to higher income, but not always. Further, the ratio of wealth to income is not one to one. Low-wealth households in California generally have lower wealth than annual income, while high-wealth households typically have nearly 14 times as much wealth as income.

## High-wealth households have net worth many times that of low-wealth households

Dollar value at percentile



Sources: Author's analysis of 2024 Survey of Income and Program Participation data.

Notes: Dollar values from 2023 net worth adjusted to pertain to 2024.

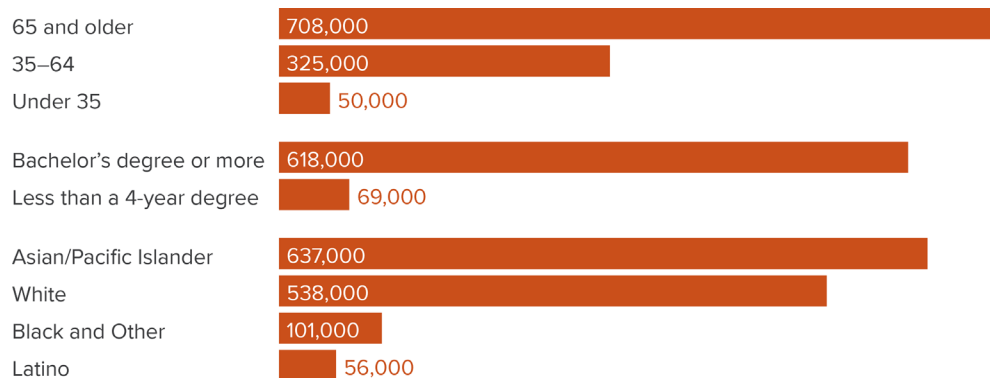
## Net worth is highest among older, college-educated, and white and Asian households.

- ▶ Older households have more wealth than younger households do. Those over 65 have a median net worth of \$708,000, compared to \$50,000 among households under 35. This reflects assets built over the life course, including home equity; older households are about three times as likely as younger households to own homes (69% vs. 21%).
- ▶ Holding a college degree is also associated with higher wealth. Median net worth is \$618,000 for households where at least one person holds a four-year degree, compared to \$69,000 for households without.
- ▶ White and Asian households have similar wealth at the median (\$538,000 and \$637,000), while Black households (along with Native American, multiracial, and other households) have substantially less (\$101,000). Latino households have the lowest median wealth, at \$56,000.
- ▶ The state also sees gaps between US-born and immigrant households (\$407,000 vs. \$126,000), and between households headed by men and women (\$387,000 vs. \$235,000).
- ▶ Wealth varies across the state, with estimated median values [topping \\$1 million](#) in parts of the Bay Area and west Los Angeles County. Communities in central Los Angeles County and Fresno County have some of the state’s lowest estimated median wealth levels.

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## Household wealth varies substantially across demographic groups

### Median net worth



Sources: Author’s analysis of 2024 Survey of Income and Program Participation data.

Notes: Dollar values from 2023 net worth adjusted to pertain to 2024. Differences between white and Asian groups are not statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, but both are higher than Latino and “Black and other” categories at that same level. Differences between Latino and Black/other categories are not statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Race/ethnicity refers to the response of the household head; “Black and other” includes Native American, multiracial, and households not included in other categories.

## California encourages wealth-building through state and local programs.

- ▶ A [variety of programs](#)—from providing assistance to first-time home buyers to seeding savings accounts, increasing financial literacy, expanding access to credit, and reducing unsecured debt—help Californians build assets and manage debt.
- ▶ Most programs hold promise, but more robust evaluation is needed to confirm their effectiveness—especially across different demographic groups.

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Sources: US Census Bureau, [Survey of Income and Program Participation](#) (2024). For additional information and complete methodology, see Thorman and McConville, [Assets, Debts, and Wealth in California](#) (PPIC, 2025).