

# CALIFORNIA BECOMING: IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

AND THE FUTURE OF  
THE GOLDEN STATE

**WORKING PAPER:**

An In-Depth Analysis of the Facts,  
Origins and Trends of Health and  
Wellness in California



**VISION & STRATEGY FOR  
THE NEXT CENTURY**





## ABOUT CALIFORNIA 100

The California 100 Initiative envisions a future that is innovative, sustainable, and equitable for all. Our mission is to strengthen California's ability to collectively solve problems and shape our long-term future over the next 100 years.

California 100 is organized around 15 policy domains and driven by interrelated stages of work: research, policy innovation and engagement with Californians. California 100's work is guided by an expert and intergenerational Commission. Through various projects and activities, California 100 seeks to move California towards an aspirational vision—changing policies and practices, attitudes and mindsets, to inspire a more vibrant future.

This California 100 Report on Policies and Future Scenarios was produced as part of California 100's research stream of work, in partnership with 20 research institutions across the state. California 100 sponsored grants for data-driven and future-oriented research focused on understanding today and planning for tomorrow. This research, anchored in California 100's 15 core policy domains, forms the foundation for the initiative's subsequent work by considering how California has gotten to where it is and by exploring scenarios and policy alternatives for what California can become over the next 100 years.

The California 100 initiative is incubated through the University of California and Stanford.

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### READ MORE ABOUT THE FUTURE OF IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION IN CALIFORNIA

For additional background information, read the related report at [California100.org](https://California100.org).

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# **THE FUTURE OF IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION**

**A CALIFORNIA 100 WORKING  
PAPER**



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We have made important contributions to the immigrant integration field, including:

- The [California Immigrant Data Portal](#), which provides indicators on immigrants in California related to demographics, economic mobility, civic engagement, and warmth of welcome.
- Innovative analyses estimating the numbers of undocumented populations living in the United States, including [an interactive map](#) that shows the estimates of eligible-to-naturalize adults by the probability of them naturalizing.
- Narratives that lift up the interconnectedness and importance of immigrants within all our communities, through publications such as, [The State of Immigrant in Los Angeles County](#); [Los Angeles Justice Fund: Safeguarding the Safety net for LA City and County's Immigrant Communities](#); and [The State of Black Immigrants in California](#); among many others.

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## Introduction

California is often thought of as an immigrant-rich state. There is good reason for that portrayal: over a quarter of the state's population is foreign born, a third of the workforce is immigrant, and nearly half of California's children have at least one immigrant parent. Yet, our world is changing: the share of the state's population that is foreign born has been on the decline for the past several years and has been shrinking for much longer in several of the state's traditional receiving areas, such as Los Angeles and San Francisco.

That we still think of ourselves as an immigrant state reflects the massive demographic shifts and the political reactions to them that occurred in early periods. In the 1970s and 1980s, for example, nearly half of all immigrants coming into the U.S. settled in California, producing a dramatic demographic transformation, and then a backlash to immigrants in the form of voter support for Proposition 187 in 1994 (HoSang 2010; Pastor 2018). But that political explosion has largely passed and we now have the most settled (as measured by *years in the U.S.*) immigrant population of any state in the Union—something that extends to our undocumented population, two-thirds of whom have been in the U.S. for more than a decade.

**Because of this shift in the population—less inflows, more children being born to immigrants, and the more settled nature of the foreign born—the task in the decades ahead is not so much managing migration as it is encouraging the successful integration of immigrants who are here.** This is crucial for several reasons, including the fact that the next generation of native-born Californians will fare better if their immigrant parents do well. Casual observers too easily forget that the struggling day laborer or housecleaner may be someone's parent, and that expanding health care to undocumented adults and ensuring sufficient adult learning opportunities to promote economic mobility will help children as well.

The demographic imperative for immigrant integration comes from the other side of the age spectrum as well: between now and 2060, the share of the state's population that is 65 or older will rise from around 15 percent to nearly 27 percent by 2060 (State of California Department of Finance 2019). With Californians aging, demand in the "caring" sector that often employs women of color and immigrants will increase, as well as in the health sector which is also disproportionately reliant on immigrants. However, the aging of the state also implies a general need for filling in the labor force through immigration—and this means the state will have to learn to compete for immigrants, rather than assuming they will come.

Indeed, the dynamism of our economy is, in no small part, due to immigrant workers and entrepreneurs. Our dynamic tech sectors include personnel who originate from every part of the world, and who often make the choice to settle here and contribute to the state's wealth. The state benefits from a significant presence of international students who—beyond paying higher tuition that support educational institutions—often find a way to stay and contribute their skills and business acumen. In general, immigrants have higher rates of labor attachment and self-employment, helping to maintain the state's economy afloat in good times and bad. Whether we retain this talent—or lose it to other states—is critical to the state's future.

Also, when thinking about talent, it is important to stress that it is not just high-skilled workers who need to be lured to the Golden State. As we suggest in this report, modern economies join together various skill levels. Our most educated immigrant workers are often clustered with undocumented and less-educated immigrants who provide key services: behind every software engineer is an army of nannies, gardeners, and food service workers. California faces a general issue of inequality it must address by recognizing that appealing to the top of the labor market must be coordinated with lifting the bottom of the labor market—and immigrants are both a part of the problematic pattern and a key to bridging divides.

In this report, we look at the state of immigrant integration in California. We begin by discussing why immigration is such a controversial issue and offer a concise history of immigration flows into the state, discussing along the way the long-standing and continuing tensions in California between extending a hand and pulling the welcome mat. Before jumping into the data, we carefully define what we mean by ***immigrant integration*** and point out how that definition has changed over time. We provide a data highlights section to facilitate a broad understanding, followed by a deep dive into the data or *facts* about immigrants in California, taking care to point out regional and country-of-origin differences in the contemporary immigrant experience. We provide historical and policy context along the way, explaining the *origins* of or driving factors behind the contemporary picture, including a discussion of key policies and community organizing that have shaped California's "warmth of welcome." We close with a review of the likely future *trends* and an overview of the policy issues at stake.

## Facts and Frames

### FRAMING IMMIGRATION

Immigration has always been a subject of both celebration and contention in the U.S. On the one hand, America likes to portray itself as a nation of immigrants (albeit on indigenous land that was tilled through some of our history by the labor of enslaved people), a place where people come from around the world to offer their skills and realize their dreams. There is indeed an element of truth to this part of the American narrative, and we certainly find examples of startling, if sometimes uneven, progress, particularly for second generation children of those who cross our borders (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters 2004). But it is also the case that the mythos of immigrant success is used to signal that anything is possible in ways that obscure the persistent pattern of racism that has held back Black, Native, and many Mexican Americans, *and* that has colored the reception and experience of non-European immigrants in recent decades (Telles and Ortiz 2008).

This shifting and racialized reception is glimpsed in a second narrative around immigrants—perhaps most crystalized by Huntington's volume, *Who Are We?* (Huntington 2005). This view suggests that immigrant progress may have once been true but that the shift in immigration to more flows from Latin America, in particular, has created challenges. In this perspective, newer immigrants are more difficult to absorb, both because they are often less-educated than the U.S.-population, and so can strain our economic system, and because they are culturally distinct in ways that make assimilation and

integration less possible. The proper response according to this perspective is not to welcome and embrace newcomers but rather to reject and preserve resources for those who are already here.

These two ways of framing immigration have certainly played out in our recent national politics, with the Trump phenomenon suggesting a cultural unease with immigrants as well as demonstrating the power of a narrative that paints immigrants as economic “takers” rather than hard-working “creators” or “contributors.” Standing in opposition to this stance on immigration is the view that sees immigrants as adding to the diversity and economic power of the country, while also recognizing the complex racial and economic dynamics that have prevented many immigrants from making as much progress as in the past. For example, incorporating immigrants into higher-wage employment is more challenging in an era of deindustrialization and sharply diverging returns to education. Racism against immigrants of color raises roadblocks to advancement for new arrivals that were less forceful or binding in an earlier era. The research generally squares with this nuanced view but its’ very complexity makes communication and framing more challenging.

Two summaries of the facts at a national level have contributed to our understanding of the data, if not always to our understanding of each other (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2015, 2017). As it turns out, some of the worries of Huntington and others regarding the ability of the newest immigrants to make progress over time are overblown: not only do we see economic and education gains as might be hoped for, but we also see that one marker of fitting in—the acquisition of English over time by immigrants and their children—is on pace with historical patterns, with some research suggesting that immigrants themselves are actually learning English more rapidly now than at the beginning of the twentieth century (Landgrave 2019).

On the economic side, the story offers important complexities. First, immigration is crucial to economic growth, with immigrants helping to fill in parts of the labor market even as they provide a cushion for U.S.-born workers during downturns (Cadena and Kovak 2016). Second, less-skilled newcomers do tend to have some deleterious effects on the wages of less-educated incumbent workers, although most research suggests that the impacts are quite minor and when they exist, tend to mostly impact previous immigrants. Third, immigration tends to be a fiscal winner, yielding more in taxes than in government expenditures, with this being a positive impact that unfolds across generations.

There is another complexity on the fiscal side that explains why states and localities might have a different perspective than federal authorities: in the shorter run, the federal government tends to see upticks in revenues from income and other taxes, while local and state expenditures rise to address the needs of immigrants and their children. This can lead to tension, such as in the early 1990s in California, when at least part of the spoken concern about undocumented residents was attributed to a sense that the federal government should have picked up more of the tab. At the same time, it suggests why California would be wise to retain the immigrants it has: having made the investments in the early post-arrival years of immigrants and their families, it would be costly to lose residents just as they are more settled in and likely moving to higher-paying positions.

If the facts about immigrants are relatively settled in the academic world, they are much less settled in the rough-and-tumble world of American and California politics. The recent campaign to recall Governor

Newsom attained momentum with a population frustrated about COVID-19 restrictions, but the first substantive reasons offered for his removal in the official recall petition stated: “Laws he endorsed favor foreign nationals, in our country illegally, over that of our own citizens,” (California Secretary of State 2021). The negative reaction to Central American families at our borders or Afghans seeking refuge after the Taliban takeover reveal that a “nation of immigrants” is often worried about how immigrants (and their children) will change us. While the evidence stacks in favor of immigrant contributions and continuing immigrant integration, policymakers and civic leaders must take the cultural dynamics seriously.

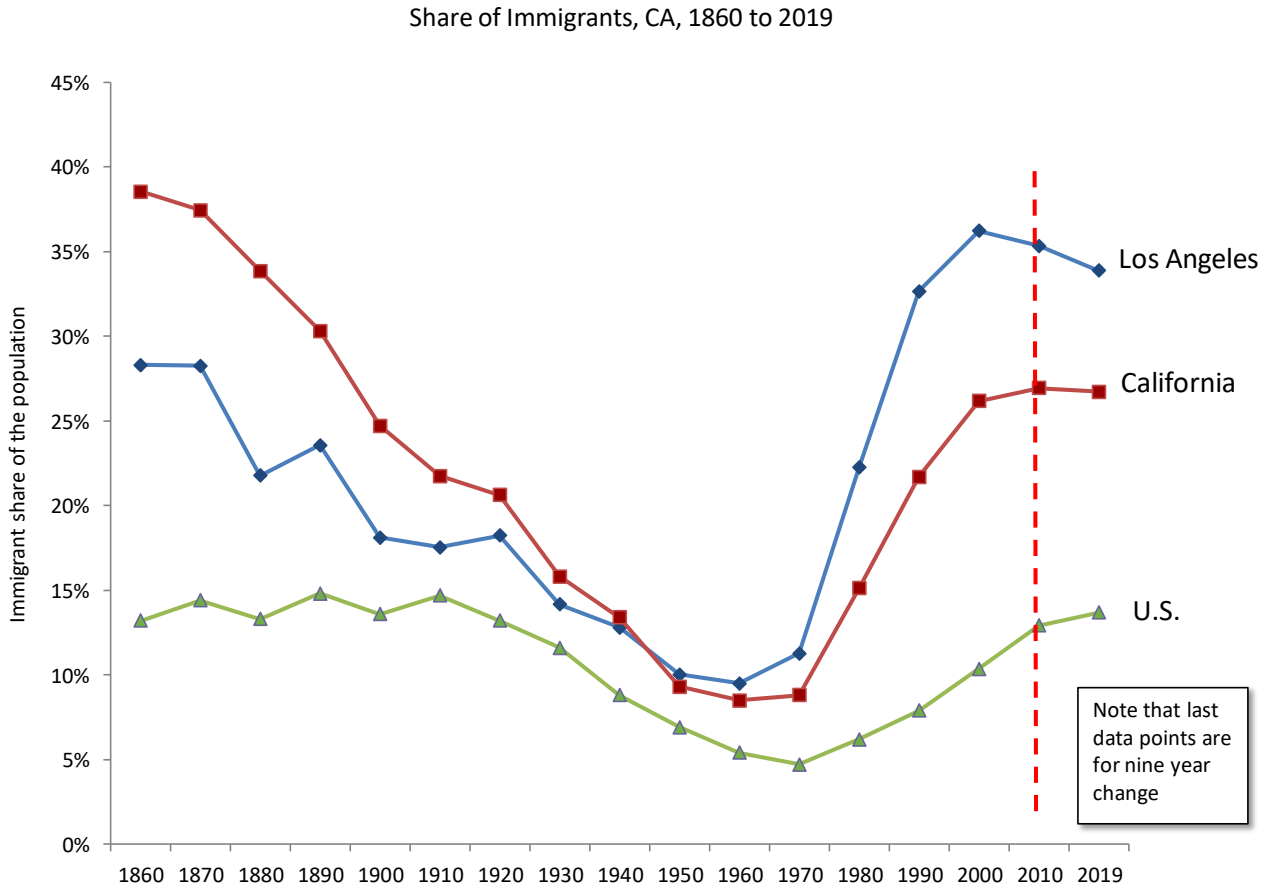
## **THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

So, what is the history of immigration and its impacts on California? A look at the time trends in Figure 1 reveals that California has always had a higher ratio of immigrants to its total population than the U.S. overall, and the divergence was particularly high in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and then again at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One explanation for this initial high presence is that the state had been Mexican territory at its incorporation; however, an even stronger explanation is that the influx of foreigners from Europe and Asia were eager to join an economy booming with opportunity through the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Together, individuals from Europe or Asia comprised nearly 90 percent of California’s immigrants between 1860 and 1900, while those from Mexico and Latin America actually fell from 8 percent to 3 percent of California’s foreign-born population.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Data from the U.S. Census, utilizing the IPUMS SDA tool. The percentages are the share of the foreign born; for later years and for the contemporary period, we focus on the citizen variable which varies slightly (since not everyone who is foreign born is a noncitizen, most prominently children born abroad of U.S.-citizen parents).

**Figure 1. Share of Immigrants, CA, 1860 to 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of United States, 1850-2019 data from IPUMS SDA (<https://usa.ipums.org/usa/sda/>).

Like the rest of the U.S., the share of immigrants in California fell sharply after the 1920s as the U.S. adopted a series of immigration laws aimed at restricting new arrivals, particularly from Southern European countries that had not contributed to the earlier stock of would-be Americans. However, the share of immigrants in California had been declining dramatically even prior to that. This steady decline was due not so much to California’s failure to attract immigrants, as it was to an increase in its native-born population, as migrants from other states moved West and more Californians were born in the state. Highlighting the extent of California’s population change is the fact that while the number of immigrants in California more than quintupled between 1860 and 1920, the number of out-of-state migrants grew nine-fold and the number of “homegrown” (or born-in-state) Californians grew seventeen-fold, with all these changes far outpacing the tripling of the overall U.S. population in that period.

What this pattern suggests is something Californians know: we have long been a magnet for those with aspirations of a better life (although in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, that mostly meant people coming

from the rest of America). Population growth in the state has always been higher than in the rest of the U.S. until just this last decade. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw extraordinary growth on a small base but that was followed by a tripling of the population between 1940 and 1970, which is especially significant given that the rest of the country grew by about 50 percent. Looked at another way: in 1940, California was home to 5 percent of the country's population but by 1970, it hosted just under 10 percent of the U.S. population (a figure that would rise to 12 percent by 1990). California, in short, was a state that developed a practice of welcoming at least some newcomers, hoping to tap into their desire to work hard, buy homes, and launch the state into a brighter economic future.

Yet California's welcome was not for everyone. Part of the declining immigrant share even prior to 1920 was due to anti-Asian policies, including national-level restrictions on Chinese and Japanese immigration as well as a generally hostile local context of reception that included the 1871 anti-Chinese mob violence and lynchings in Los Angeles (Zesch 2008). As the 1930s dawned, the Great Depression stirred up anti-Mexican sentiment and led to mass deportations that included Mexican Americans who had been born in the U.S. (Balderrama and Rodriguez 2006). Black migrants from the South were also met with hate and resentment as their numbers swelled when the state's demand for labor rose during World War II – and even white migrants from Oklahoma were socially rejected although this was less enduring than the racism aimed at immigrants and people of color.

The state's tug of war between a spirit of inclusion and a bent for exclusion—reflected in the national-level conflict between the concept of a “nation of immigrants” and a desire to roll up the cultural drawbridges—came to a head in the early 1990s with the battle over Proposition 187. This ballot measure was ostensibly aimed at restricting the access of undocumented immigrants to various state services—including education—to preserve fiscal coffers, an issue highlighted above. Instead, many saw it as a governor fanning the flames of worry as a strategy to provide sufficient political cover for his reelection (HoSang 2010). He tapped into deep concerns held by some constituents about an unprecedented flow of foreign-born migrants to the state.

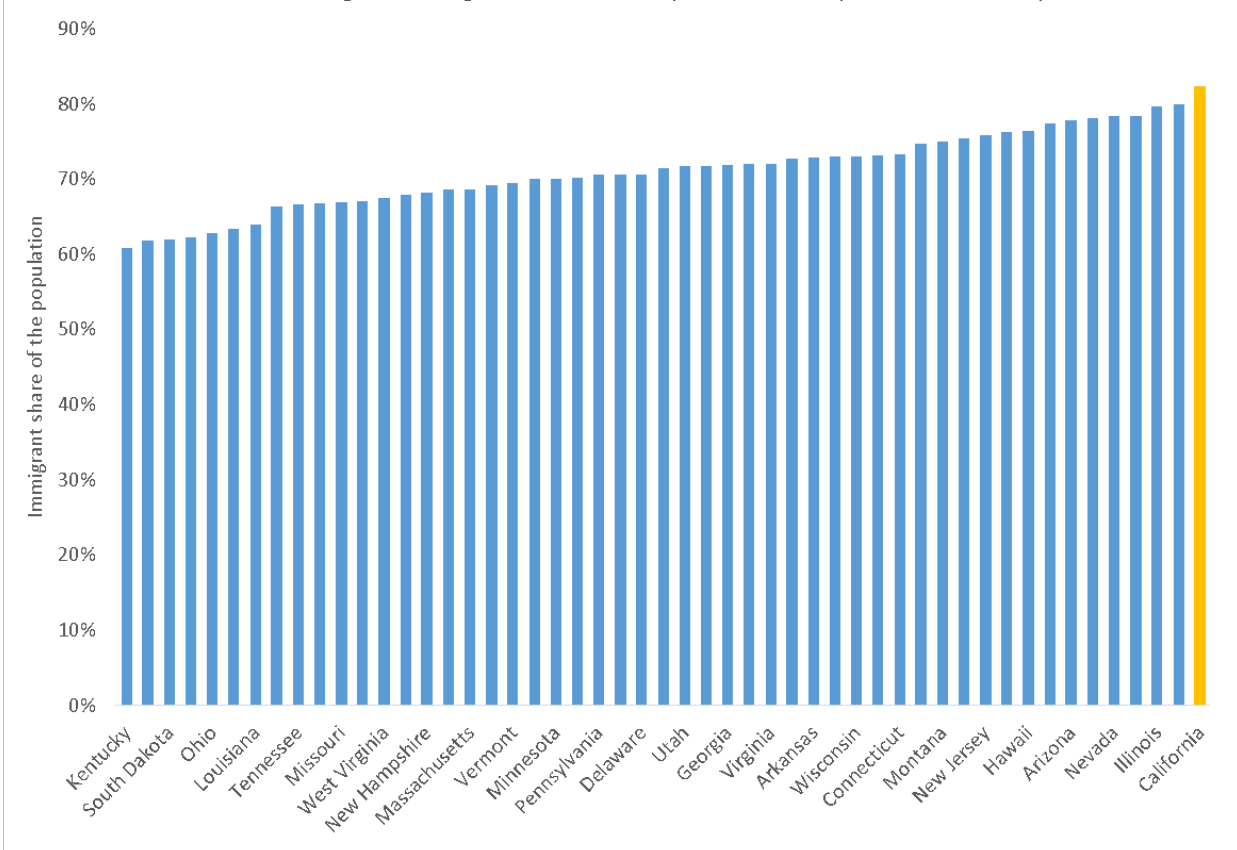
Indeed, as noted in our intro, nearly half of all immigrants coming into the U.S. in the 1970s and 1980s settled in California; as a result, the share of Californians that were foreign born increased from about 9 percent to nearly 22 percent. In a comparison of seven metropolitan areas, Mollenkopf and Pastor (2016) show that such an “immigrant shock” can create political and social tension, particularly when a large share of the migrant flow is undocumented. This was the case in California, particularly in Los Angeles County which received nearly a quarter of the nation's new immigrants in those two decades. Figure 1 shows how California presaged the nation and how Los Angeles presaged California.

While the political pendulum seemed to be swinging in an anti-immigrant direction, Proposition 187 had the effect of galvanizing Latino voters and gave wind to the careers of Latino politicians who would make their mark by embracing immigrants (partly because such a large share of the undocumented were Latino, a point we note in the data below). Helping this along: In 1986, the Reagan administration pushed for the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). While IRCA tightened enforcement, it also created a path to citizenship for millions, some of whom went on to vote against policies that were less receptive of immigrant communities.

California has since shifted to become one of the most welcoming states in the U.S., having pushed the envelope on policies that allow for driver’s licenses, in-state tuition, and even some range of government-subsidized health care for undocumented residents. It has amounted to what scholars Ramakrishnan and Colbern (2015) have termed the “California package:” a set of policies that provide a form of state citizenship in which many rights and opportunities are nearly identical (but not fully so) to those of lawful residents, whether they be U.S. born or immigrants.

Despite our often welcoming policies, we now face a different shock: We are in danger of losing the dynamism immigrants bring. Our share of the nation’s immigrants has shrunk. In 1990, California hosted a third of the nation’s immigrants and the state is now down to 23.6 percent. Partly as a result, California has the most long-settled immigrants in the nation, with approximately 82.0 percent having been in the U.S. for a decade or longer (see Figure 2). That brings advantages—such as immigrants’ economic progress over time—but also new challenges, including caring for aging immigrants who have faced economic hardships and have little savings.

**Figure 2. Share of Immigrants Living in the U.S. for Ten Years or More by State of Residence**



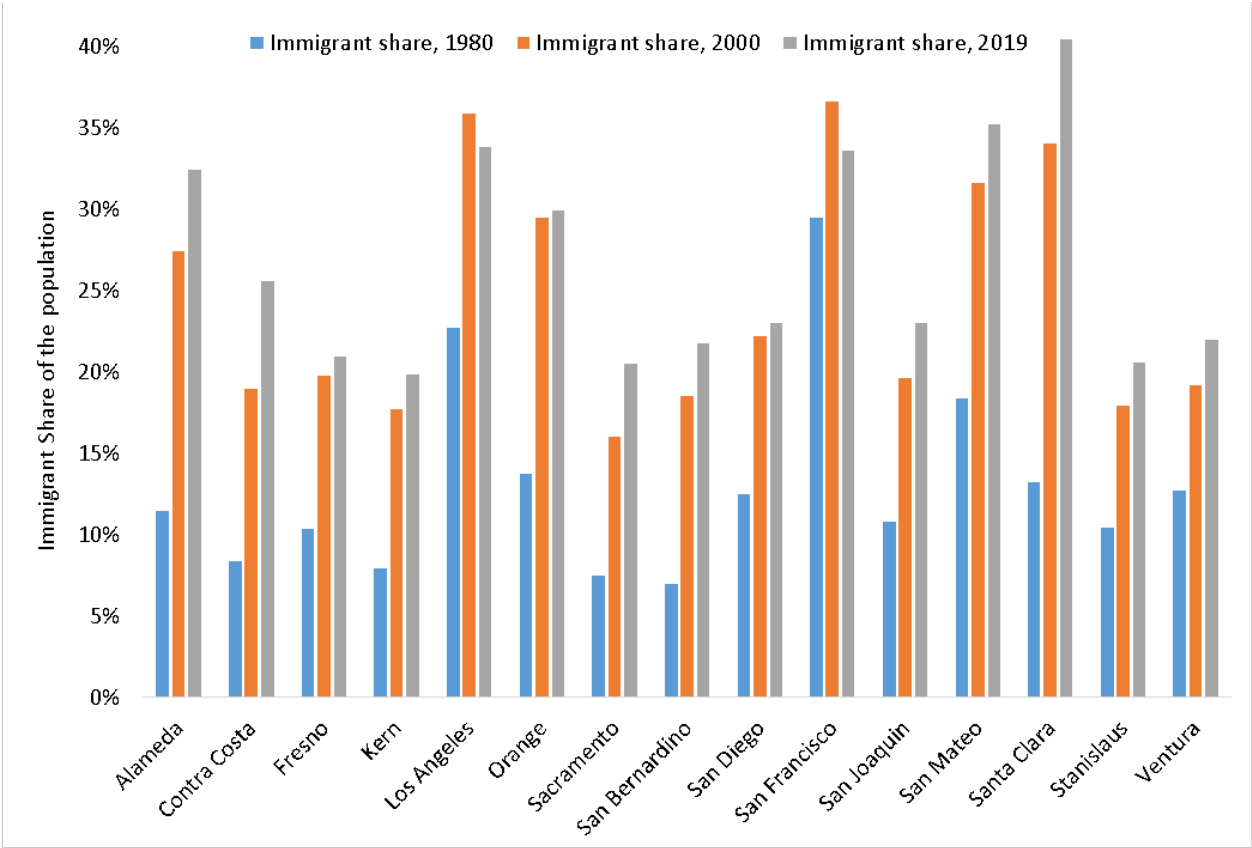
Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of United States, 1850-2019 data from IPUMS SDA (<https://usa.ipums.org/usa/sda/>).

Long-term settlement has also contributed to the changing geography of immigration. For example, the “spatial assimilation” models of the past tended to predict a split between city and suburb, in which immigrants would radiate outward over time in keeping with their economic success, have a desire for

homeownership, and adopt American culture. Yet we are on the cutting edge of a new geography where some suburbs are direct entry points for immigrant arrivals and where some tired inner-ring suburbs—such as the working class enclaves that make up the cities of southeast Los Angeles County—have become islands of distress, rather than platforms of opportunity or symbols of “making it” (Cheng 2013; Pastor 2013; Vallejo 2012).

This changing geography is also regional, as traditional entry points such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Orange, and San Diego Counties are seeing either declines or stabilization in the share of their foreign-born population (see Figure 3). There are also very rapid increases in the share of foreign born in the Silicon Valley (Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties), partly reflecting job growth and labor demand, and in the East Bay (Alameda and Contra Costa Counties), which likely corresponds to residents being priced out of San Francisco and the peninsula. One key trend: newer destinations, such as the Central Valley and the Inland Empire are experiencing rises from what was a very small base in 1980. Both service delivery and community organizing infrastructure to assist immigrant integration has often been more focused on our bigger urban areas on the coast, and yet the new geography calls for an inland California and suburban focus as well.

**Figure 3. Immigrant Share of Population by CA County, 1980, 2000, and 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of United States, 1850-2019 data from IPUMS SDA (<https://usa.ipums.org/usa/sda/>).



## WHAT IS IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION?

So how are immigrants in California doing and what are the challenges they face? How important are the geographic variations highlighted above? What difference does legal or lawful status make in terms of stability for families? What are the ongoing patterns and how do they help us understand the trends to come? To explore all these questions, we turn to an examination of the contemporary data. However, to make sense of our organization of that data, it is useful to define what we mean by immigrant integration and how that leads to a particular lens on the available facts.

Both immigration scholars and the broader public have historically talked about immigrants through a lens of assimilation. Based largely on the experiences of the flows of Europeans to the U.S. in the 1880s to 1920s, assimilation theory assumed that immigrants would, over generations, lose their language and specific cultures and enter the American mainstream (Gordon 1964). Along the way, economic mobility and political participation would rise; there was even an entire body of work devoted to the notion of spatial assimilation in which immigrants would enter through urban centers and then eventually decamp to the suburbs (Massey 1985).

These traditional views of assimilation have been challenged by a recognition that immigrant integration is a two-way street. After all, America shapes the immigrant experience but immigrants shape America, contributing essential services, becoming involved in and shaping politics, and acquiring English while also opening up new possibilities for multilingual media and marketing. In their book *Remaking the American Mainstream*, Alba and Nee (2003) point to the ways in which the so-called “mainstream” shifts as a result of immigrants remaking the worlds they encounter, while Jiménez (2017) has highlighted how people with several generations of history in the U.S. are jointly adapting to social and cultural shifts prompted by the latest influx of immigrants.

It is important to stress that integration is also not automatic nor easy. After the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 reduced racialized country preferences that had been part of the U.S. system since the 1920s, the U.S. immigrant population became far more diverse.<sup>2</sup> But declaring that race mattered less in who came in did not mean that race mattered much less in how they were treated. As a result, a whole field expanded that focused on “segmented assimilation” and the ways in which mobility for racialized immigrants and their offspring might be downward or divergent over time (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993; Telles and Ortiz 2008).<sup>3</sup>

Partly because of the debates about who is transforming who and to what—as well as an increasing understanding of the role of racism in initial reception and generational progress—the term “assimilation” has been largely replaced in the academic and public policy sphere with the term “immigrant integration” (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2015). In our own work, we have specifically suggested that immigrant integration can be defined by immigrants’

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<sup>2</sup> For example, in 1970, the first year for which we can approximate the Hispanic or Latino population, immigrants comprised less than 5 percent of the total U.S. population and nearly three-fourths were non-Hispanic white. The 2019 data show that immigrants are now nearly 14 percent of the total population and only 17 percent are non-Hispanic white.

<sup>3</sup> In recent work, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Pastor have noted how entry into an historically Black neighborhood like South L.A. leads to a hybrid identity that is uniquely place-based and not necessarily associated with a downward trajectory (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Pastor 2021).

economic mobility and civic participation and how open the receiving society is to immigrants (which we term “warmth of welcome”) (Pastor and Ortiz 2009).

There are several advantages to this framing, particularly for this report. The first is that all three dimensions are measurable, providing an objective baseline to capture the state of California and to measure progress. The second is that the frame is very much two-way: rather than assuming immigrants will integrate on their own in a sort of natural “assimilation” process, we highlight how the context of reception and the evolution of policy matters. The third is both analytical and strategic: the shift to an integration perspective allows us to both steer away from a vision of cultural transformation, at least of the one-way sort assumed in earlier theories of assimilation, *and* to more carefully examine the role of racism in impeding progress.

For example, in an era in which diversity is generally considered a positive trait, the language of integration allows each new American to find their own way into a constantly shifting mainstream. It is a frame that can insist on the importance of learning English to boost economic prospects without insisting that another language be forgotten or dismissed. In our experience and research, it also tends to create a more productive conversation between immigrants and non-immigrants as well as between liberals and conservatives, both of whom agree that integration is a good thing.

Yet the language of integration should not be used to sidestep the role of the cultural conflicts that can lead to waves of xenophobia and resistance to immigrant progress. It is these racialized politics—and whether immigrants and their allies develop their own push-back—that help to determine the contours of governmental policy responses. Any frank discussion of the future needs to tackle the underlying issues about racism and fears of demographic change that often make common sense ideas, like immigration reform, uncommonly hard to enact. In our view, an integration lens that includes a focus on the “warmth of welcome” does exactly that.

With regard to the task of actually measuring immigrant integration, our first dimension, *economic mobility*, refers to the progress of immigrants over time. After all, immigrants often arrive and find themselves underpaid for a number of reasons, including a lack of education, undervalued for the education they do have (particularly if their degree was granted by a foreign institution), and facing issues associated with immigration status, language abilities, and discrimination. What counts is not necessarily where immigrants start, but how they and their children progress. While this time dimension is often hard to measure and often gets approximated with cohort-style data slices, it is important to keep in mind the notion of forward movement.

Our second dimension, *civic participation*, refers to traditional political measures, such as rates of naturalization, voting, and political participation in public meetings and civic organizations. Other measures of civic engagement in the contemporary include the degree of linguistic isolation and the extent of digital access. Finally, in a state that hosts more than 2.4 million undocumented residents<sup>4</sup> – nearly one-quarter of the nation’s total—one must also consider the degree of involvement in and state

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<sup>4</sup> Of the undocumented immigrant population in California, we estimate approximately 61,500 are TPS holders and slightly more than 175,000 are DACA recipients.

of community organizations, social movements, and other vehicles to ensure that their voices also find their way into public decision-making.

Our third dimension, *warmth of welcome* refers to both the attitudes of incumbent residents and the supportive or non-supportive character of government policies. Measuring this can be, to a certain extent, more inexact, with qualitative changes, like new policies, opening resources to undocumented Californians or shifts in rhetoric and tone standing in for “harder” measures of involvement. But we also rely on other measures, such as ethnic-based hate crimes and access to public benefits as reasonable proxies. We note that such receiving society openness is not uniform across the state; this is one of many arenas where understanding regional variation is key.

## **HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE DATA**

In the following sections, we apply this three-part definition to gauge the state of immigrant integration in California. We start with a deeper dive into the contemporary demographics, and then offer a wealth of data on economic mobility, civic participation, and warmth of welcome. Because we offer such an encyclopedic view, it may be worthwhile to highlight a few broad data points to keep in mind even as we start:

### **Demographics**

- While there has long been a sense that California’s immigrants largely hail from our most proximate neighbor, Mexico, the share of Mexican migrants has been on a steady decline and the share of immigrants from Asia, other parts of Latin America, and elsewhere has been on the rise.
- While there is also a tendency to think of undocumented residents as recent arrivals, more than two-thirds of undocumented Californians have been in the U.S. for longer than a decade. They have formed families and become deeply embedded into our economic and social fabric.
- The extent of that impact can be seen in the fact that the 2.4 million undocumented residents live with more than 3 million family members who are U.S citizens or lawful residents. Nearly 14 percent of California’s population is either undocumented or living with a family member that is, implying that barriers based on legal status are of widespread importance.
- Immigrant growth in the state has slowed and the share of foreign born, as noted above, is falling. There seems to be less immigrants moving in the state and more immigrants selecting a different destination upon their arrival. Concerns persist about not receiving our share of new immigrants and there are reasons to worry that move-out may tick up.

### **Economic Mobility**

- Composing over a third of the workforce, immigrants are an important part of California’s economy. They are an especially important part of agriculture, construction, and manufacturing, often occupying the lowest paying rungs on those labor ladders. Immigrants also make up about a third of health care practitioners and over 40 percent of health care support.

- While they may not be considered immigrants in the sense that they are formally slated to stay, H1-B visa holders are concentrated in the high-tech sector, make significant contributions, and can often adjust their immigration status to remain in the U.S. California holds a special appeal: the Golden State has only 12 percent of the nation's population but it hosts over 22 percent of the nation's H1-B visa holders.
- While some immigrant workers enjoy status and income, immigrant wages are generally lower than they are for the U.S.-born, including when disaggregated by race and gender. Naturalized citizens come closest to the income profile of the U.S. born, partly reflecting more time in the U.S. and partly reflecting their distinct legal status. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the undocumented fare the most poorly in the state.
- Educational gaps explain a significant portion of the wage divergence between U.S-born and immigrant workers, raising questions about what should be done to promote adult education as well as facilitate the "credentialing" of degrees earned in other countries. Education efforts should be aimed at both the children and their parents.
- Even if employed in a full-time job, immigrants are still more likely to fall into poverty, and especially more likely to have household income below 200% of the poverty line. Partly for this reason, labor unions have had a special appeal to immigrants. As such, immigrant workers have helped maintain union presence in California.
- By race/ethnicity, immigrants are more likely than their racial/ethnic counterparts to be self-employed. While some of this reflects exclusion from formal employment because of immigration status or a lack of credential recognition, it also reflects an embrace of an entrepreneurial spirit. If properly supported, immigrant-owned small businesses could contribute significantly to the state's economy.
- Broad categories can mask important disaggregated differences. For example, the median income for households headed by South Asian Indian immigrants is about three times that of households headed by Hmong immigrants. Large educational distinctions within Asian and other immigrant groups persist as well.
- The median household income for immigrants tends to grow with length of residence in the country, reflecting the upward mobility pattern many aspire to achieve. Here too, disaggregation helps clarify the pattern: The recent shift to more Asian migrants and the settling in of the undocumented has meant that the income levels of those most newly arrived can look higher even though the data square with a pattern of progress over time.
- With time in the U.S., home ownership also rises dramatically for immigrants, regardless of status. This reflects the usual process of aging into ownership but the pattern persists even when we disaggregate by age breaks, suggesting a real desire to build a life in California.
- One challenge to retaining residents is rent burden, which is a disruption to residential stability. Rent burden is high for everyone in California, making this a very common-ground issue; at the

same time, it is felt most acutely by undocumented Californians, introducing yet another aspect of instability in their often precarious lives. Accompanying this are very high rates of overcrowding (discussed in Warmth of Welcome), often undertaken to spread rent costs.

- Such instability is a particular feature of the state’s current political economy: Immigrants and people of color were over concentrated in the essential high-risk and high-contact work that left them working as COVID-19 broke out and were also over-indexed in the high-contact sectors of the economy that shut down as the pandemic played out (such as restaurants and hospitality). As a result, they were sharply battered by both the health and economic impacts of COVID-19. A full state recovery will need to keep this in mind.

### **Civic Participation**

- While English language acquisition remains on pace with the historical experience, linguistic isolation—in which no one in a household who is 14 or over speaks English “very well”—remains an issue, particularly for households headed by an undocumented immigrant. Language access, including for Indigenous immigrants and others from less populous groups, is a key piece of civic engagement that some immigrant-serving organizations are working to bridge.
- Linguistic isolation has a distinct regional pattern with the highest levels in the Central Valley, as well as Monterey and Los Angeles Counties. Of special note is high levels of language isolation for Latino immigrants in northern California where immigrant services are scarce, a feature which complicates outreach and support during wildfires.
- Naturalization is important because it yields economic benefits as well as greater opportunities for civic participation. There are approximately 2.2 million Californians who meet all the naturalization requirements of legal status and time in the country, but who have not yet made that leap. Concerted outreach efforts could boost the economy and expand community voice in decision-making.
- There are significant ethnic gaps in naturalization rates, with Latinos lagging far behind all other immigrant groups. The factors behind this are complex, including the high costs of naturalization and a fear that filling out naturalization forms might identify undocumented family members. The state could help matters by launching a targeted campaign for citizenship.
- The digital divide is another gap that impedes both civic participation and economic progress for immigrants, particularly the undocumented. This affects adults to be sure, but it also proved to be a significant barrier in the context of remote learning for the children of immigrant parents during the pandemic. Addressing this will require going beyond simply laying out the lines as costs and capacity continues to be an issue for many low-income immigrant households.
- With gaps in support from the state and local governments, community-based organizations have stepped in to provide both services and a vehicle for voicing concerns. This vibrant organizing and representation of the immigrant community are important reasons why

immigrant concerns have been considered in formulating policy, such as the expansion of health care and pandemic relief.

## **Warmth of Welcome**

- Community organizing and social movements have also helped to change the political terrain of the state, creating a dramatic shift away from the anti-immigrant attitudes and policies of the early 1990s, to a welcoming and supportive set of policies.
- This does not mean that all is well in the Golden State. Hate crimes based on race/ethnicity have generally ticked up since the mid-2010s and the wave of anti-Asian violence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a cause for concern.
- California’s aggressive moves to expand health insurance have been quite successful and the state can boast that it ranks thirteen among U.S. states in coverage of immigrants. This is remarkable given our disproportionate share of undocumented residents. Still, both non-naturalized legal residents and undocumented Californians are lagging far behind U.S. citizens in health care coverage.
- The lack of insurance coverage is of particular concern for undocumented seniors, but there are new efforts to address this, as well as continuing efforts at both state and local levels to expand the health safety net to include all Californians. The extent of health protection is a key signal of warmth of welcome and the state’s effort to include undocumented Californians in relief and outreach actions taken during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Since the government cannot do it all—and may not provide assistance with as much cultural competency as would be optimal—an ecosystem of immigrant-serving organizations has risen. The extent and strength of these networks varies tremendously across California’s regions, and there is room to lift all to the highest levels.
- Although California has declared itself a “sanctuary state” under the 2017 California Values Act, deportations originated in California have been on the rise, creating significant instability in the lives of immigrants, particularly given the high share of mixed-status families noted above.
- While the current immigrant integration efforts are not well-organized at the state level, there may be support for a statewide strategy. California public opinion is highly favorable to immigrants, with a recent survey from the Public Policy Institute of California finding that 85 percent of adults support a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants (PPIC 2021).

## **The Data in Detail**

### **IMMIGRANT CALIFORNIA: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS**

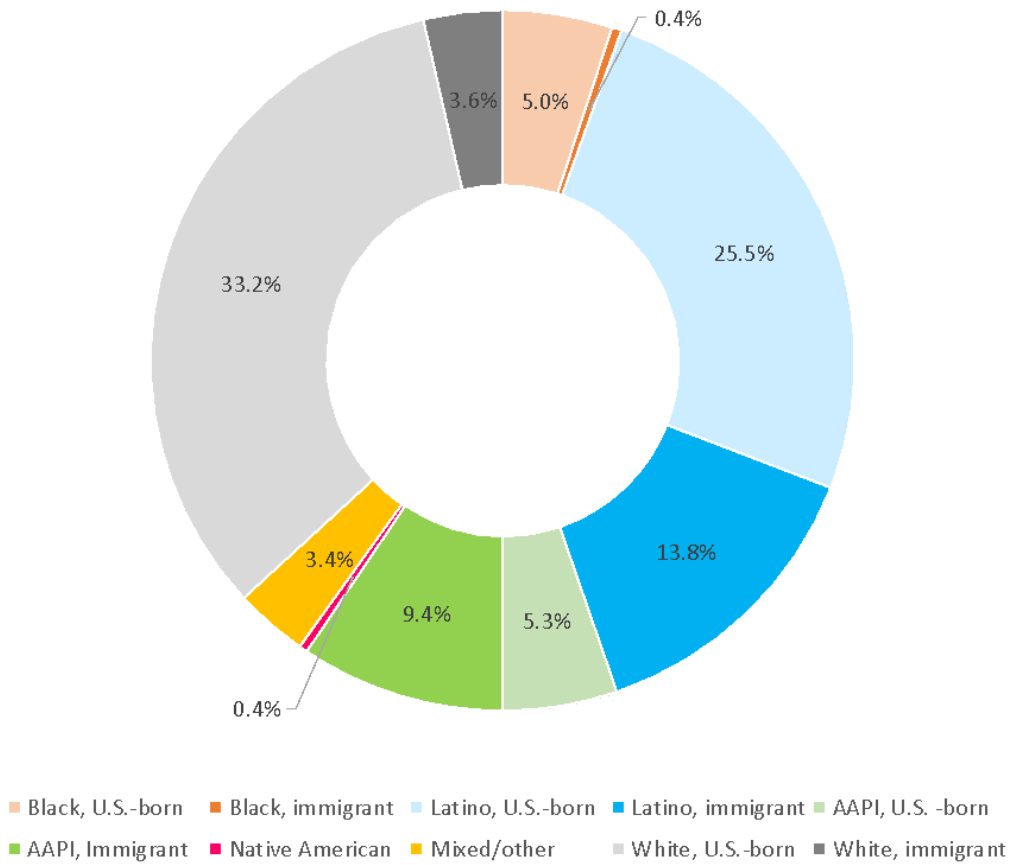
The most recent American Community Survey (ACS) estimates that approximately 10.5 million immigrants resided in California in 2019, nearly 27 percent of the state’s entire population. This makes California home to more immigrants than any other place in the United States and even entire

countries, including Canada and the United Kingdom. In addition to its large size, California's immigrant population is among the most diverse by several measures, like race/ethnicity, status, recency of arrival, and educational attainment. In regards to diversity of status, for example, California leads the nation in having the largest population of undocumented immigrants with what we estimate to be more than 2.4 million residing in the state as of 2019. Los Angeles County alone has a very large undocumented population, with 8% of the County's residents identifying as undocumented. As such, how California is integrating its increasingly growing and diversifying immigrant population has been a continued point of interest for many scholars, researchers, and policymakers who see the state as a bellwether of immigrant integration for the rest of the country.

California has long been a popular destination for immigrants from around the world seeking refuge, opportunities, and the American dream (Johnson, Perez, and Mejia 2021). Metropolitan areas including Los Angeles, Riverside-San Bernardino, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, and San Jose are classified as immigrant gateways, yet they differ by historical timing and relative growth of their immigrant population (Singer 2008). For instance, the Los Angeles metropolitan area is a "well-established gateway" as a large number of immigrants have settled in the area since the post-WWII era (2008:9). However, recent research shows that places such as Los Angeles and even California as a whole are experiencing slower and shifting immigrant population-growth (Singer 2015).

It is not surprising how racially and ethnically diverse the state's immigrant population has become over the last century. As Figure 4 shows, at nearly 14 percent of the state's population in 2019, Latino immigrants made up the largest share of foreign-born residents, followed by immigrants who identify as Asian American / Pacific Islander (9.4 percent), white (3.6 percent), and Black (0.4 percent). Among Californian immigrants that recently arrived—arriving between 2010 and 2019—53 percent were from Asian countries; meanwhile, 31 percent were born in Latin America, marking a significant shift in migration patterns that used to be dominated by immigrants from Latin America (Johnson et al. 2021).

**Figure 4: Population by Race/Ethnicity, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

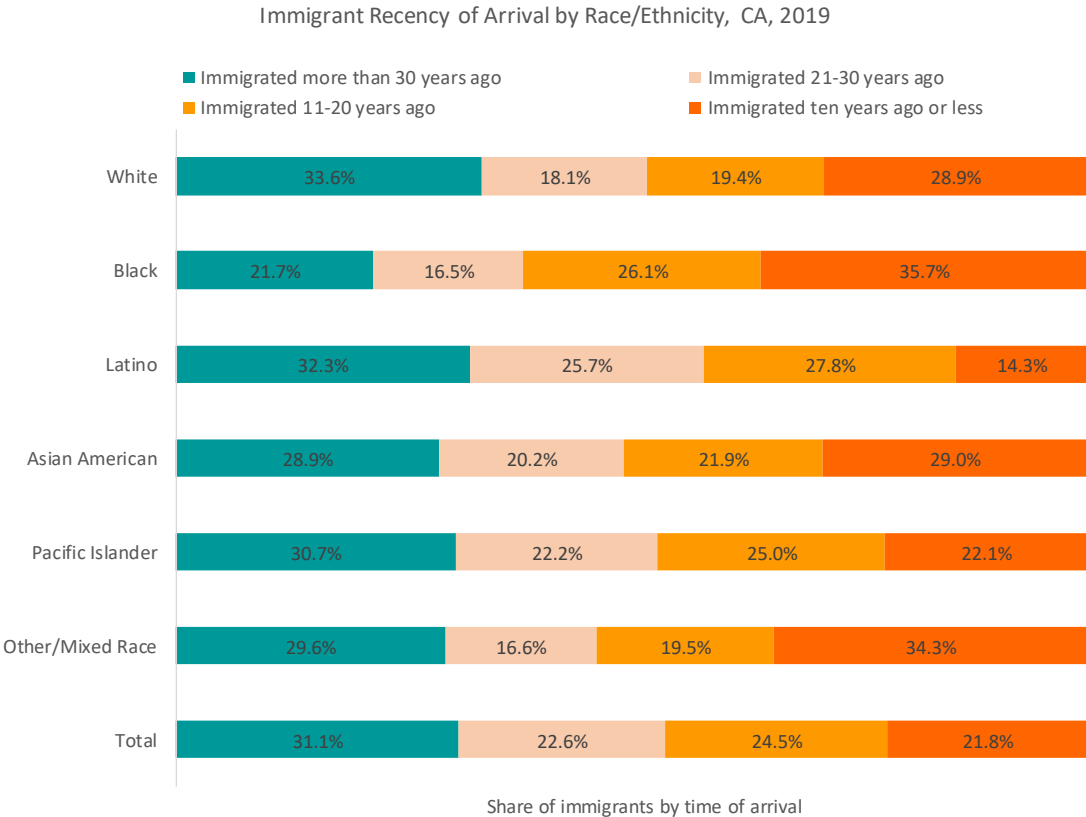
As a border state with Mexico, 36 percent of Mexican immigrants in the U.S. live in California, with Los Angeles County being home to the largest number of Mexican immigrants of any county in the U.S. (Israel and Batalova 2020). Besides geographic proximity, migration from Mexico to California and the U.S. has deep ties to the U.S.-Mexico political economies, including labor shortages stemming from U.S. immigration policies that blocked traditional sources of labor from China, Japan, and Europe; the ensuing Bracero Program that provided Mexican labor; the integration of the railroad systems; the economic boom in California during the 1950s and 60s; and the changing economic uncertainty in Mexico (Durand, Massey, and Charvet 2000:5).

Even though Mexican immigrants are the largest share of migrants among Latino immigrants in California, Mexican migration has leveled off. In recent decades, the number of Central American immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras has increased as they have sought refuge among the ongoing economic instability, political turmoil, violence, corruption, and devastation from the impact of hurricanes, earthquakes, and drought in the region (Babich and Batalova 2021).



When looking at immigrants’ recency of arrival by race/ethnicity (Figure 5), Latino immigrants are the most likely in California to have lived in the United States for more than a decade. More than 85 percent of Latino immigrants immigrated to the United States more than 10 years ago, meaning less than 15 percent arrived within the last 10 years. In contrast, 28.9 percent of white immigrants, 29 percent of Asian American immigrants, 35.7 percent of Black immigrants, and 34.3 percent of Mixed Race/Other immigrants arrived within the last decade. Changes in U.S. immigration policy and shifting migration trends help explain the racial/ethnic makeup of immigrants through their recency of arrival, including large-scale catastrophes (e.g., 2010 Haiti earthquake) and changes to the economic landscape leading to an influx of highly skilled and highly educated workers from Asia.

**Figure 5: Immigrant Recency of Arrival by Race/Ethnicity, CA, 2019**

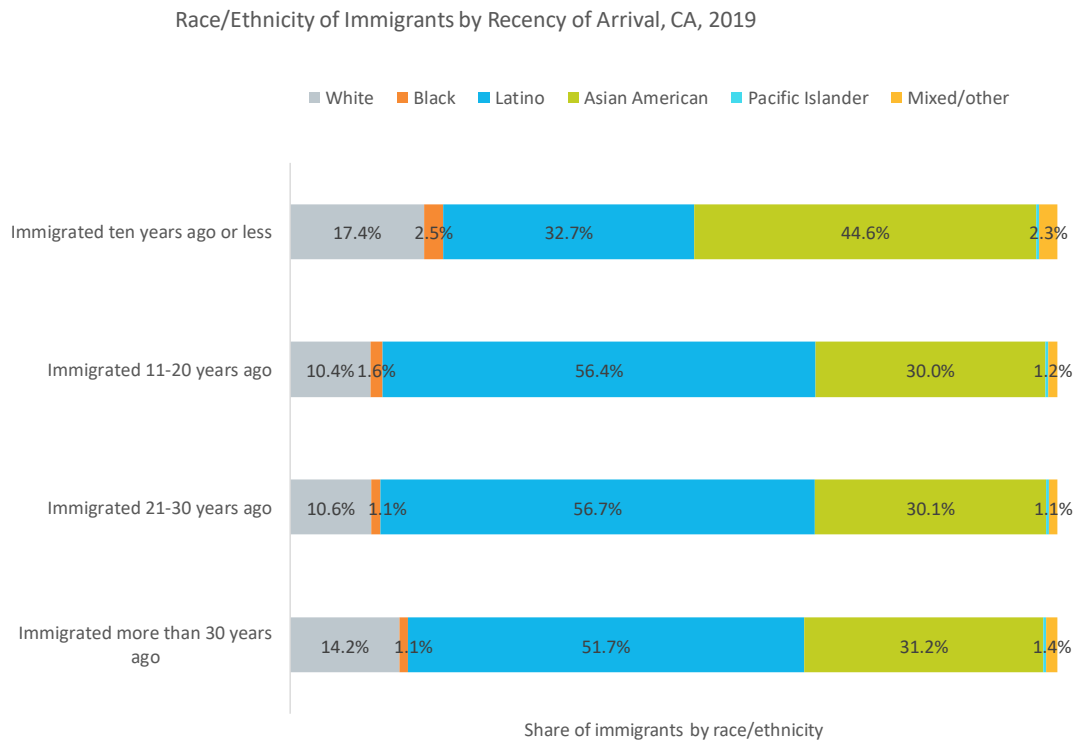


Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Data represent a 2015-2019 average. Note: The breakdown for Black immigrants here only includes those who identify as non-Hispanic Black. It also does not include those who identify as Mixed race. Data also available on the California Immigrant Data Portal, <https://immigrantdataca.org/indicators/recency-of-arrival#/?breakdown=3>.

Though each racial/ethnic group of immigrants in California have a significant share of long-settled residents, the demographic makeup of more recently-arrived immigrants is becoming less Latino and more Asian, Black, and white. Of all the immigrants in California who arrived in the United States within the last 10 years, as shown in Figure 6, nearly 45 percent are Asian American, whereas Latino

immigrants make up 32.7 percent. An examination of countries of origin in Figure 7 reveals that immigrants from Mexico comprise the largest share of migrants who immigrated within the last decade, followed by immigrants from China (11.9 percent), India (10.5 percent) and the Philippines (8.1 percent). This trend differs when looking at immigrants who arrived more than 30 years ago, the majority of whom are Latino (51.7 percent). Immigrants from Mexico still make up the largest share but at 40.5 percent, followed by the Philippines (8.2 percent), Vietnam (5.8 percent), and El Salvador (4.5 percent). This is indicative of the shifting racial/ethnic makeup of newly arrived immigrants. Mexican migration to the U.S. declined due to several factors, including decreasing employment opportunities during the Great Recession (2007-2009); stricter immigration enforcement and immigration structures post-9/11; lower fertility rates and a shrinking domestic working-age population among the Mexican population; and a more stable Mexican economy (Gonzalez-Barrera 2021; Hazán 2014; Villarreal 2014; Zúñiga and Molina 2008).

**Figure 6: Race/Ethnicity of Immigrants by Recency of Arrival, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Data represent a 2015-2019 average. Note: The breakdown for Black immigrants here only includes those who identify as non-Hispanic Black. It also does not include those who identify as Mixed race. Data also available on the California Immigrant Data Portal, <https://immigrantdataca.org/indicators/recency-of-arrival#/?breakdown=3>.

**Figure 7: Top Birth Countries for those who Migrated More than 30 Years Ago and Less than 10 years ago, CA, 2019**

**Top Birth Countries for those who Migrated More than 30 Years Ago, CA, 2019**

Country	Number	Percentage of Total
Mexico	1,388,382	40.5%
Philippines	280,099	8.2%
Vietnam	199,902	5.8%
El Salvador	154,980	4.5%
China	131,292	3.8%
Korea	119,907	3.5%
Taiwan	75,578	2.2%
Iran	74,904	2.2%
Guatemala	67,971	2.0%
All Other Countries	933,383	27.2%

**Top Birth Countries for those who Migrated Less than 10 Years Ago, CA, 2019**

Country	Number	Percentage of Total
Mexico	533,839	22.2%
China	285,656	11.9%
India	251,726	10.5%
Philippines	193,481	8.1%
El Salvador	94,833	4.0%
Vietnam	94,289	3.9%
Guatemala	73,382	3.1%
Korea	71,585	3.0%
Iran	57,998	2.4%
All Other Countries	743,523	31.0%

Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

There is a greater diversity of culture and experiences shaped by immigrants' different countries of origin. Though the vast majority of Latino immigrants in California come from Mexico (78.0 percent), it is important to note that many Californians with Latino ancestry are primarily foreign-born. For example, 62.8 percent of those with Guatemalan ancestry, 66.1 percent with Honduran ancestry, 56.1 percent with Nicaraguan ancestry, and 61.7 percent with Salvadoran ancestry in California are immigrants. The Asian American community also experiences a similar pattern. The majority of Asian American groups in California are primarily immigrants, including those with Chinese ancestry (65 percent), Nepali ancestry (84.9 percent), Burmese ancestry (77.8 percent), Filipino ancestry (58.1 percent), Indonesian ancestry (68.3 percent), Korean ancestry (66 percent), Taiwanese ancestry (67.4 percent), Thai ancestry (65.7 percent), and Vietnamese ancestry (68.2 percent).<sup>5</sup>

It is important to disaggregate these racial/ethnic groups to further understand how different communities may have different needs to help them integrate. For example, California is home to the largest population of Salvadoran immigrants, many of whom have Temporary Protected Status (TPS) (Warren and Kerwin 2017). TPS is a temporary immigration status provided to immigrants from countries designated by the U.S. government for such protective status, which includes protection from deportation. However, TPS holders face particular challenges due to their temporary conditional status, such as being denied most federal benefits and being unable to adjust to lawful permanent residency

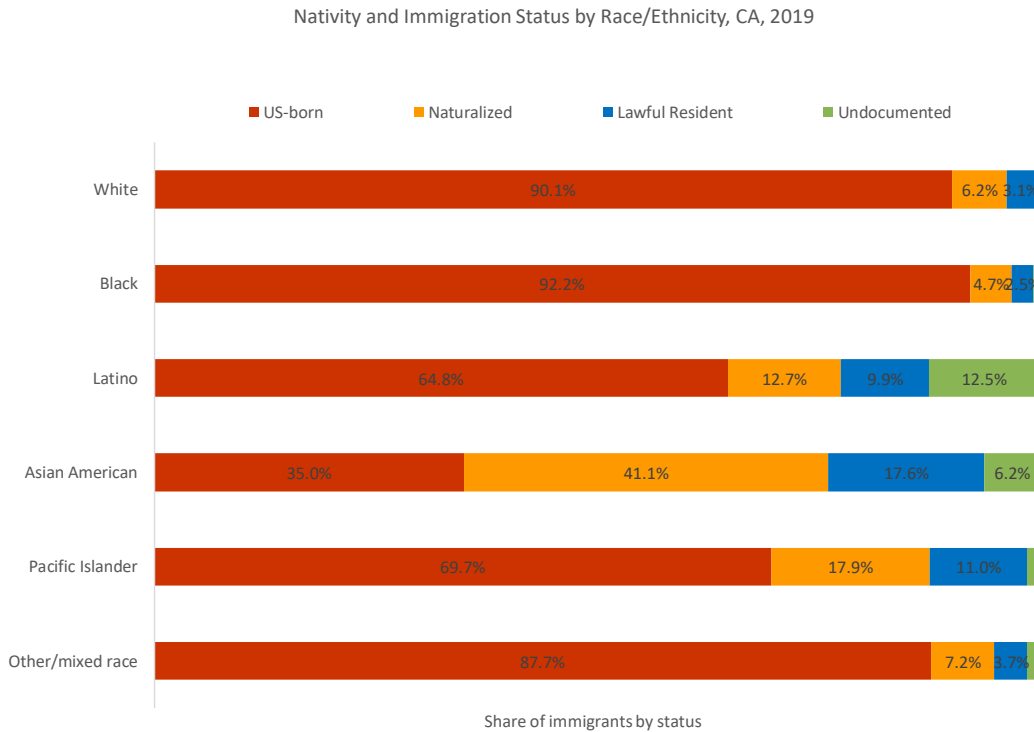
<sup>5</sup> These statistics were calculated using the ANCESTR1 variable in the 2015-2019 ACS IPUMS microdata. These numbers may differ slightly from the IPUMS SDA numbers by using our weights which accounts for the undercount of the lawful resident and undocumented population (Pastor, Le, and Scoggins 2021).

(LPR) status. This places groups like Salvadoran TPS holders in a precarious legal limbo unique to their community.

When examining nativity and immigration status, California exhibits some unique and important trends. Our estimates show that approximately 72.3 percent of the state's population were born in the United States, whereas 13.7 percent are naturalized citizens, 7.9 percent are lawful residents, and 6.1 percent are undocumented immigrants. Though naturalized citizens comprise nearly 50 percent of the immigrant population in California, this rate differs by race/ethnicity. As Figure 8 shows, about 6.2 percent of all white California residents are naturalized citizens, which is approximately 63 percent of white immigrants in the state. Asian American immigrants have a similarly high share of naturalized citizens at 63.3 percent or about 41.1 of all Asian Californians. Though immigrants make up a small share of the Black community (7.8 percent), nearly 60 percent of Black immigrants are naturalized. In contrast, 12.7 percent of Latino Californians and 36.2 percent of Latino immigrants in the state are naturalized citizens.

California is home to the largest number of immigrants without lawful status in the nation with more than 2.4 million undocumented immigrants reside in California, which is more than 23 percent of the country's entire undocumented population. Approximately 12.5 percent of Latinos in California are undocumented, making them the most likely racial/ethnic group to not have lawful status. This is followed by 6.2 percent of Asian Americans in the state. This also means that more than 80 percent of undocumented immigrants in the state are Latino, whereas Asian Americans make up 14.6 percent.

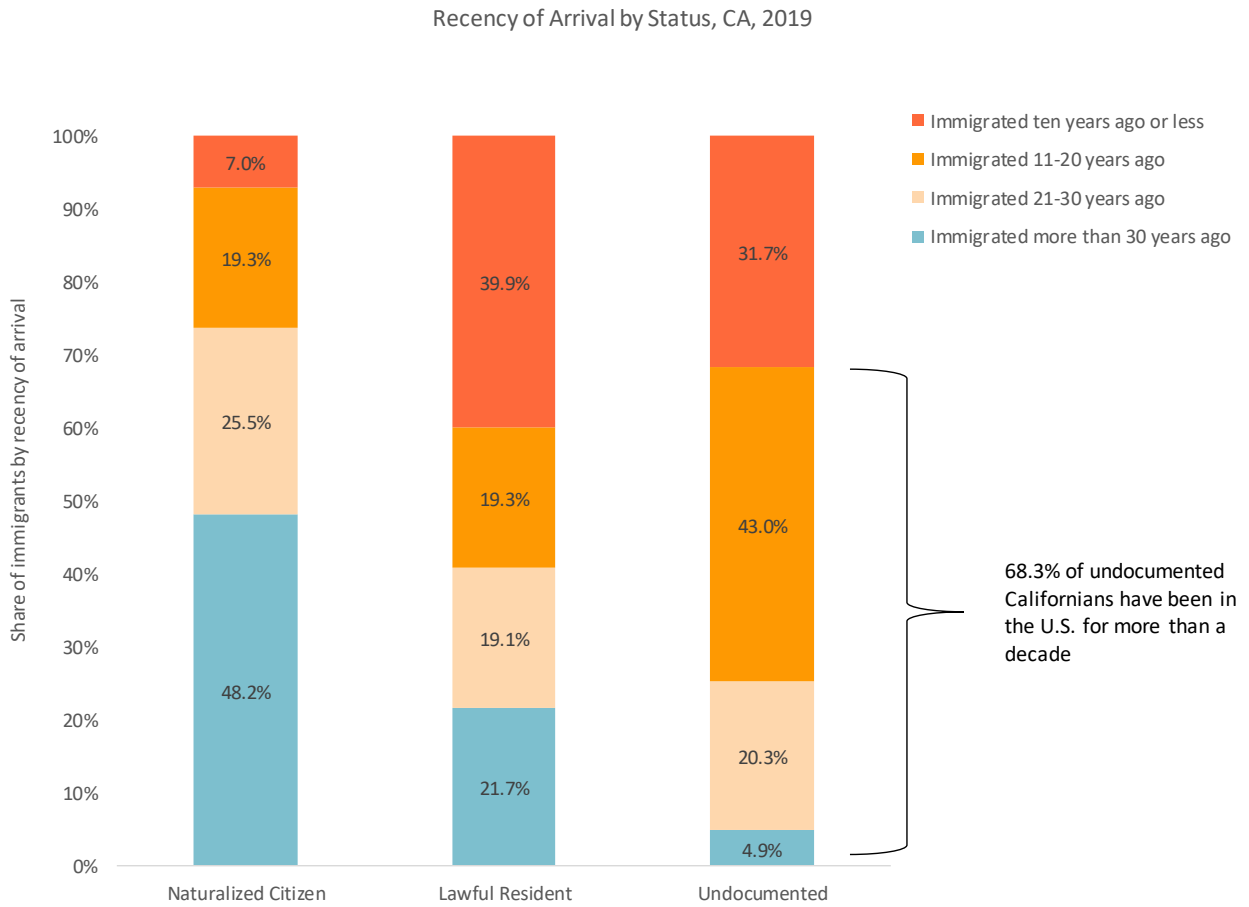
**Figure 8: Nativity and Immigration Status by Race/Ethnicity, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and LPR population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

More than two-thirds of undocumented immigrants in California have been in the United States for more than a decade (see Figure 9). As expected, a much smaller share (4.9 percent) of California’s undocumented immigrant population arrived more than 30 years ago. This is not surprising considering that immigrants without lawful status who arrived prior to 1982 were eligible for legalization under the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986.

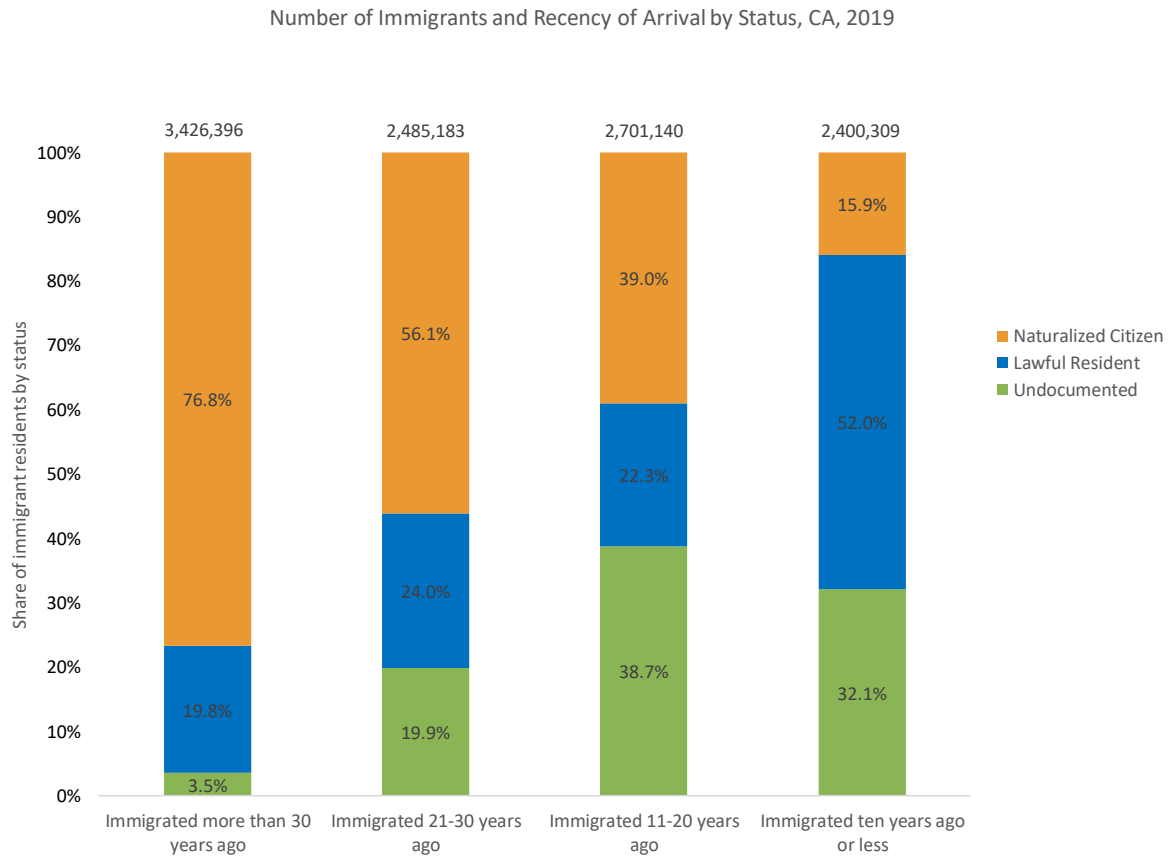
**Figure 9: Recency of Arrival by Status, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and LPR population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

As shown in Figure 10, among immigrant Californians who arrived less than 10 years ago, an estimated 32.1 percent are undocumented, 52 percent are LPR, and 15.9 percent are naturalized citizens. The share of immigrants who are naturalized citizens grows as the length of time in the United States increases, indicative of how the length of residency affects eligibility and the likelihood of naturalization associated with certain characteristics, such as English language attainment (Aptekar 2015). Nearly 77 percent of immigrants who arrived more than 30 years ago are naturalized citizens, whereas 19.8 percent are lawful residents.

**Figure 10: Number of Immigrants and Recency of Arrival by Status, CA, 2019**



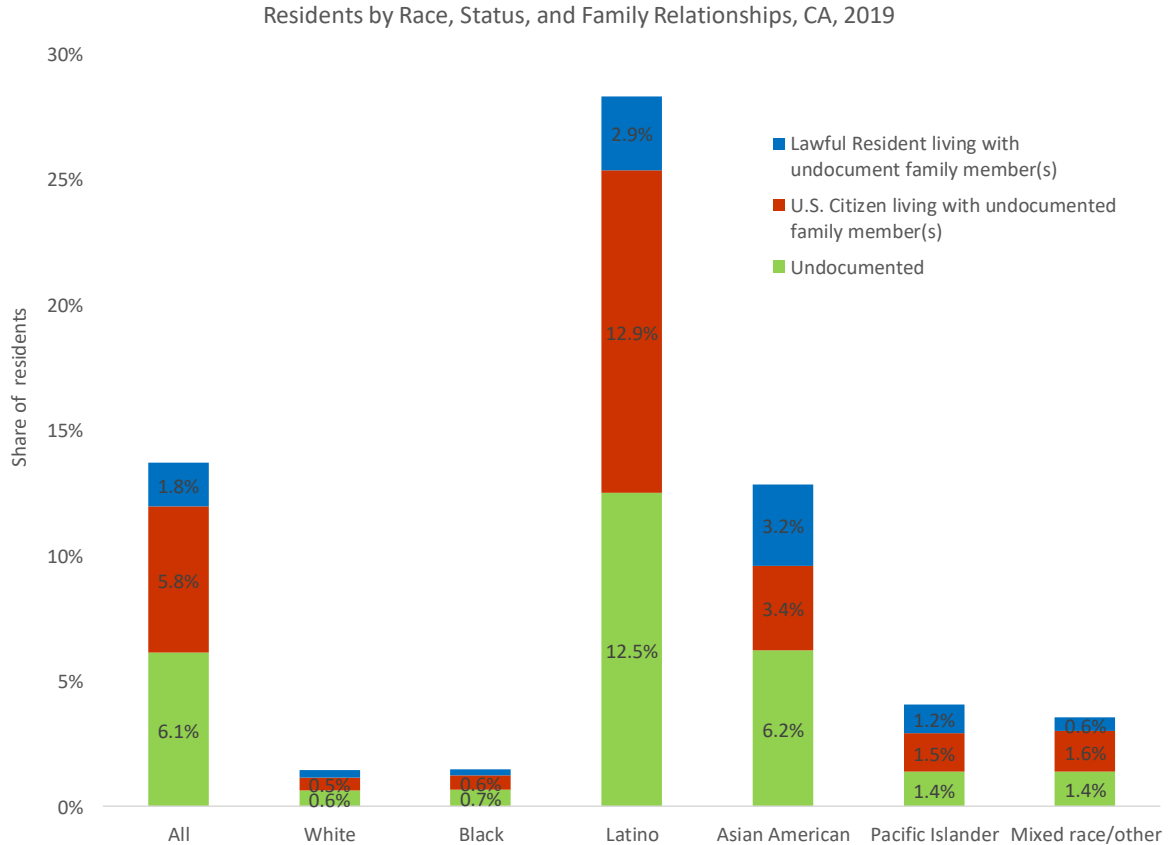
Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and LPR population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

As mentioned previously, over 2.4 million Californians are undocumented immigrants. However, more than 3 million Californians who are either U.S. citizens or have lawful status live in mixed-status families with undocumented immigrants. Of these U.S. citizens and lawful residents living with undocumented family members, 68.8 percent are U.S. born, 8.1 percent are naturalized citizens, and 23.2 percent are lawful residents. This means that nearly 14 percent of California’s population are either undocumented themselves or live with a family member who is. These mixed-status families face different challenges in their integration. For example, out of fear of deportation or becoming a public charge, many mixed-status families underutilize or entirely avoid services that may be available to them and their family, including government-assistant benefits, healthcare, and naturalization (Mapp and Hornung 2016).

There are large racial/ethnic disparities when disaggregating who is in mixed-status families (see Figure 11). Latino immigrants are significantly more likely to either be undocumented or live with an undocumented family member. Nearly 13 percent of Latino U.S. citizens and 2.9 percent of Latino lawful residents in California live with undocumented family members, while 12.5 percent of Latino

Californians are undocumented. Asian Americans are the next most likely group in California to be either undocumented or in a mixed-status family. More than 6 percent of Asian American immigrants in the state are undocumented, whereas 3.4 percent and 3.2 percent are U.S. citizens and lawful residents living with undocumented family members, respectively. White and Black immigrants exhibit the lowest likelihood of being undocumented or living in mixed-status families.

**Figure 11: Residents by Race, Status, and Family Relationships, CA, 2019**



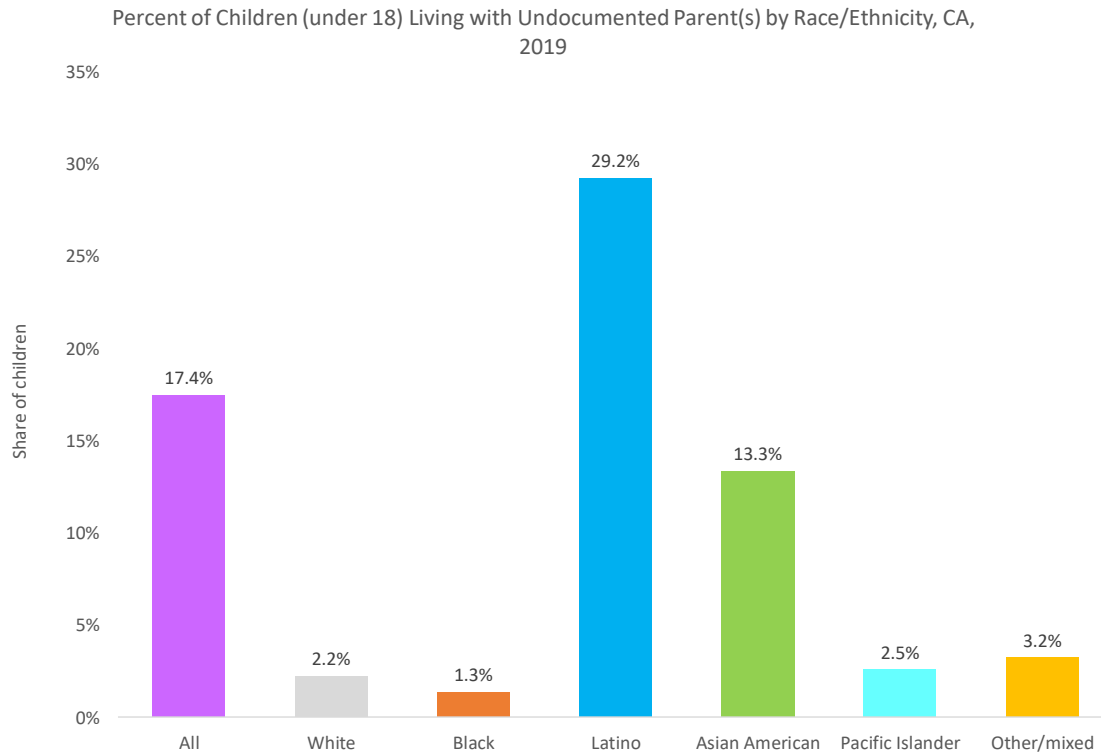
Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average. Note: The breakdown for Black immigrants here only includes those who identify as non-Hispanic Black. It also does not include those who identify as Multiracial. Data also available on the California Immigrant Data Portal, <https://immigrantdataca.org/indicators/mixed-status-families#/?breakdown=2>.

About 17.4 percent of children in California live with at least one undocumented immigrant parent. This rate, however, differs across race/ethnicity (see Figure 12). Of all Latino children in the state, about 29.2 percent live with at least one undocumented immigrant parent. This is also true for 13.3 percent of Asian American children, 3.2 percent of mixed-race/Other children, 2.2 percent of white children, 2.5 percent of Pacific Islander children, and 1.3 percent of Black children in California.



Additionally, 6.9% of the undocumented population in California is comprised of children under the age of 18 years, some who arrived as unaccompanied minors. For these groups, there are societal and legal barriers that affect whether children can access educational resources such as financial aid.

**Figure 12: Percent Children (under 18) Living with Undocumented Parent(s) by Race/Ethnicity, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average. Data also available on the California Immigrant Data Portal, <https://immigrantdataca.org/indicators/mixed-status-families#/?breakdown=5>.

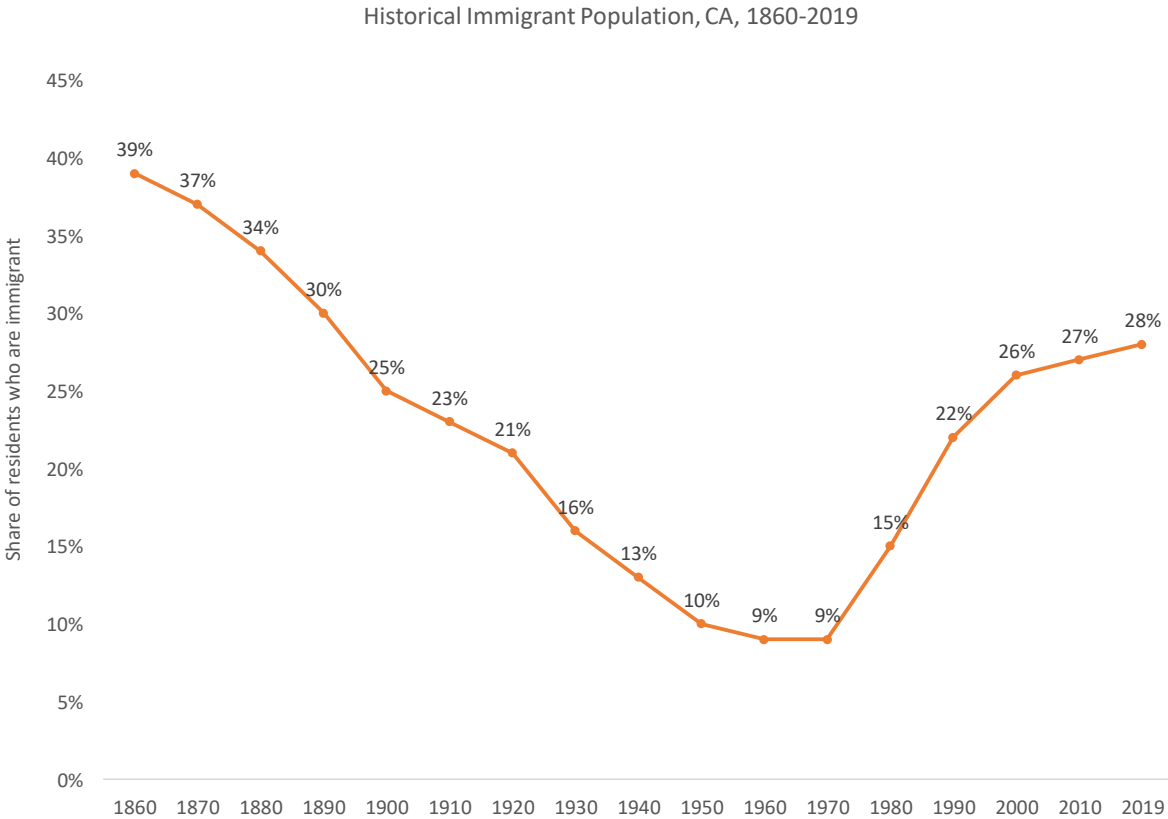
As it relates to immigrant trends and age, the number of immigrants in California has grown significantly over the last several decades with the largest increases experienced after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and the Refugee Act of 1980 (see Figure 13). According to the California Immigrant Data Portal, in 1960, there were approximately 1.34 million immigrants in California, about 9 percent of the state’s total population. Though the share of the population remained the same in 1970, the immigrant population increased to nearly 1.76 million. By 1980, California was home to 3.58 million immigrants, about 15 percent of the state’s population. The immigrant population ballooned to 6.46 million by 1990 to make up 22 percent of California’s population.

By the turn of the century, more than 8.86 million immigrants resided in the Golden State. Though this growth in California’s immigrant population has slowed since then, 2010 and 2019 continued to reach record numbers with 9.96 million and 11.01 million immigrants, respectively. Since the 1990s,

immigrants have increasingly bypassed traditional gateway cities and states for those with smaller immigrant populations or where immigrants are a smaller share overall. This shift in destinations have been shaped by a multitude of factors, including excessive low-wage workers and low-wages in traditional gateways, anti-immigrant state and federal policies such as Proposition 187 in California, and the movement of low-wage and service jobs to right-to-work states in the South and the Great Plains (Flippen and Farrell-Bryan 2021:482).

California’s population growth, like its immigrant-specific growth, has slowed and stabilized, and the COVID-19 pandemic expectedly contributed to this, yet this decline is not a grand exodus as it has been characterized to be (Johnson et al. 2021; UC Office of the President 2021). Research suggests that the slower growth we are seeing is in part linked to new immigrants moving directly to new immigrant states rather than coming to California. Nonetheless, this does not mean that immigrants are not coming to California or remaining in California, as recent research finds that less than 5 percent of new immigrant arrivals (within the past two years) actually left California (UC Office of the President 2021).

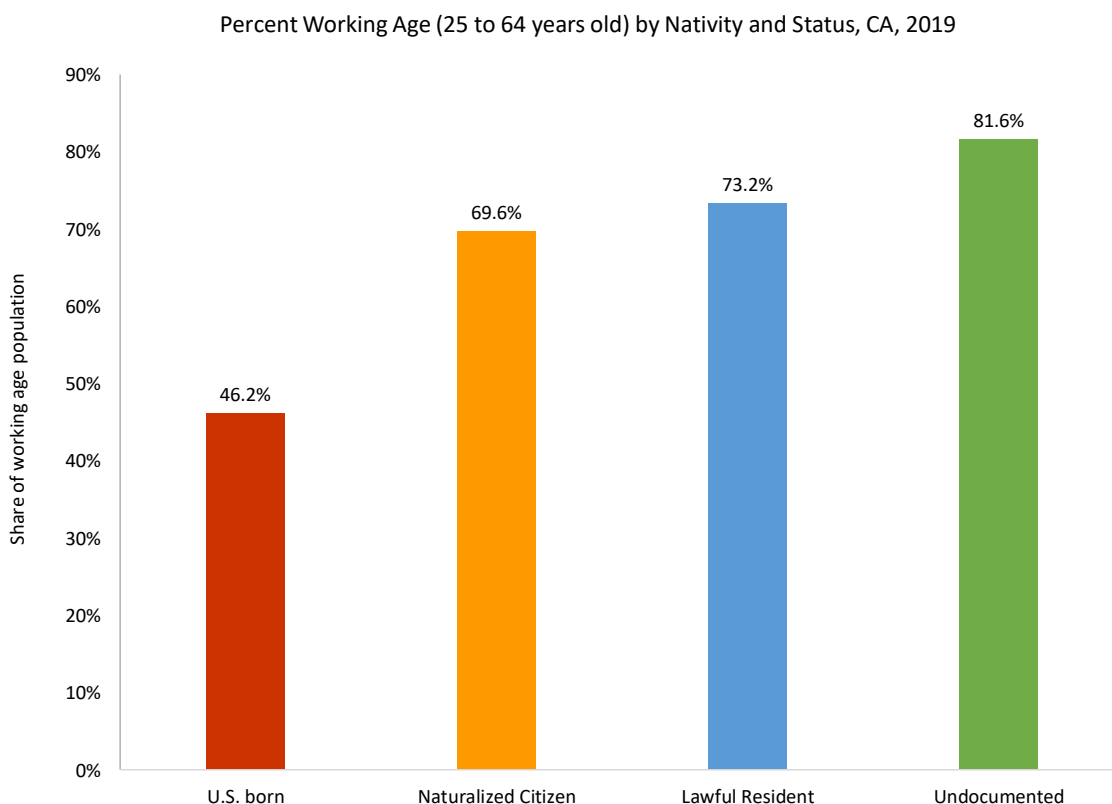
**Figure 13: Historical Immigrant Population, CA, 1860-2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of United States, 1850-2019 data from IPUMS SDA (<https://usa.ipums.org/usa/sda/>).

This slowed growth, in tandem with shifting migration patterns and a rise in second-generation immigrants, yields a relatively older immigrant population that is predominantly of working age (i.e., 25 to 64 years old). Nearly 70 percent of naturalized citizens, 73.2 percent of lawful residents, and 81.6 percent of undocumented immigrants are of working age. In contrast, only 46.2 percent of the U.S.-born population fall within this age range (see Figure 14).

**Figure 14: Percent Working Age (25 to 64 years old) by Nativity and Status, CA, 2019**

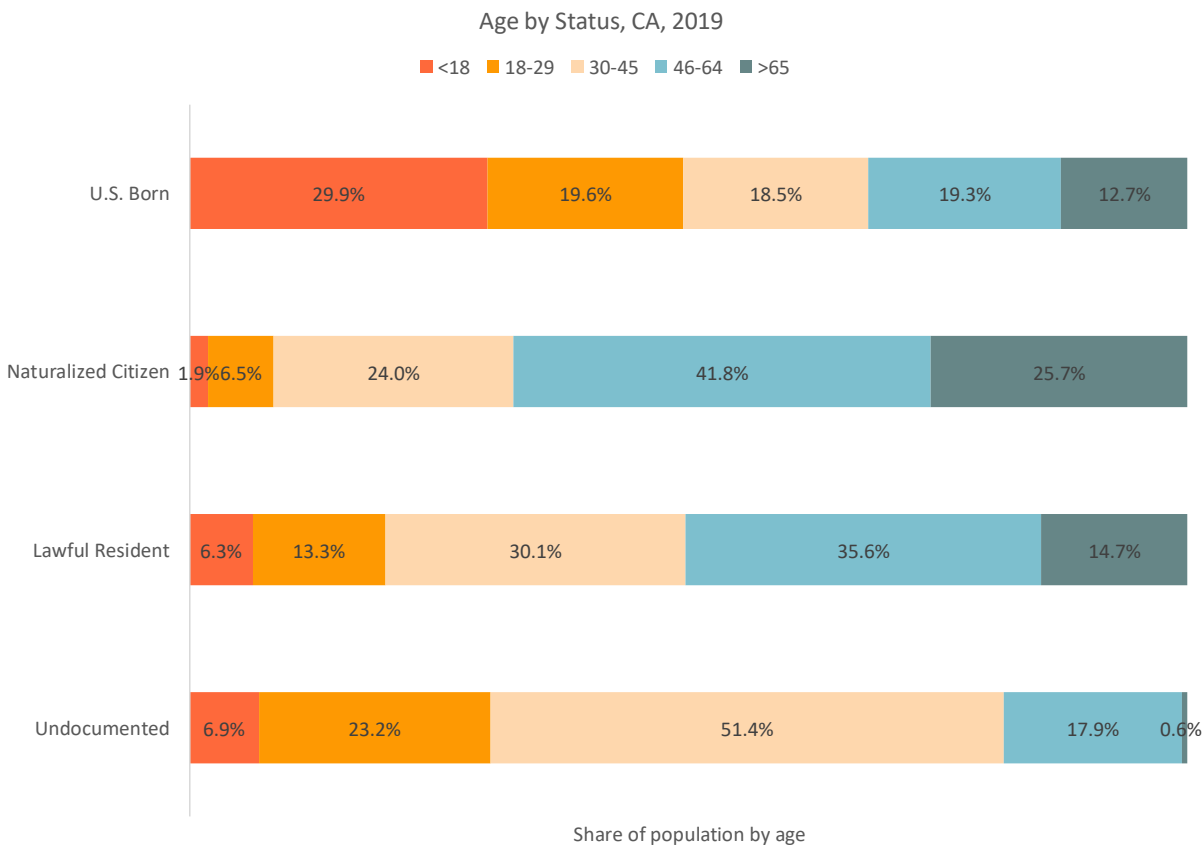


Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and lawful resident population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

As shown in Figure 15, children under the age of 18 years old make up a much smaller share of naturalized citizens (1.9 percent), lawful residents (6.3 percent), and undocumented immigrants (6.9 percent), compared to the U.S.-born population (29.9 percent). Among U.S.-born children in California, our estimates show that 46.5 percent live with at least one immigrant parent. This, however, is driven primarily by Latino, Asian American, and Pacific Islander households. In particular, 87.7 percent of U.S.-born Asian American children, 57.9 percent of U.S.-born Latino children, and 46.6 percent of U.S.-born Pacific Islander children live with at least one immigrant parent, compared to 14 percent of U.S.-born Black children and 17.3 percent of U.S.-born white children in the state.

More than a fourth of naturalized citizens are 65 and older compared to 14.7 percent of lawful residents, 0.6 percent of undocumented immigrants, and 12.7 percent of the U.S.-born population. There are many implications when considering the aging immigrant population as they face cultural and language barriers that may hinder their integration and access to certain services, like healthcare (see Warmth of Welcome for more information).

**Figure 15: Age by Status, CA, 2019**

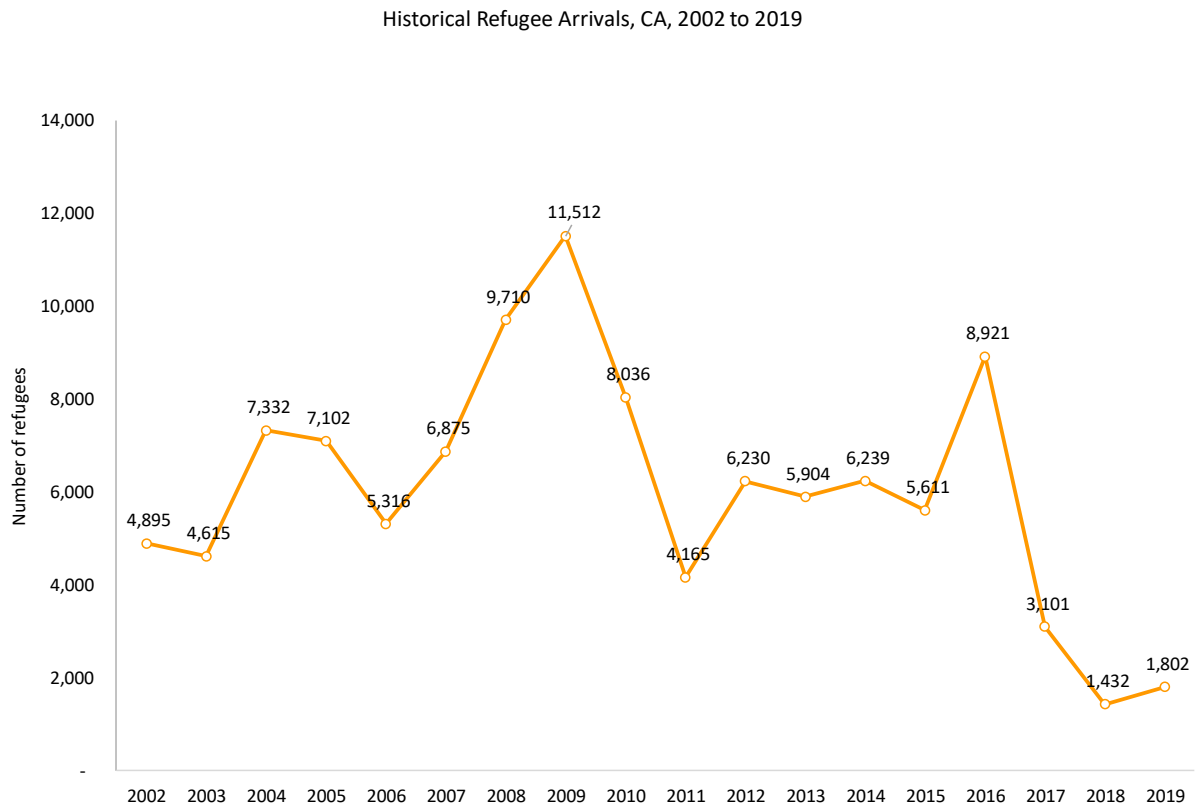


Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and lawful resident population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

In discussing California’s immigrant population, it is important to also highlight the refugee population in the state. Although the number of refugees admitted into the United States has declined significantly, California continues to be among the states receiving the largest number of refugees. Since 2002, according to the Refugee Processing Center, California has resettled approximately 108,800 refugees—the most of any state (see Figure 16). During this period, a significant share of refugees arrived from countries like Iran (27.8 percent), Iraq (26.4 percent), Ukraine (8 percent), and Laos (5.5 percent). California was a popular destination for many refugees also prior to the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In particular, California is home to a long-settled Southeast Asian refugee community. Approximately 36

percent of Southeast Asian Americans in the U.S., including Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian, and Hmong, live in California (Southeast Asia Resource Action Center and Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles 2020).

**Figure 16: Historical Refugee Arrivals, CA, 2002 to 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of data from Refugee Processing Center.

## ECONOMIC MOBILITY OF CALIFORNIA'S IMMIGRANTS

Not only is California the largest economy in the United States, as measured by GDP, it is also the fifth-largest in the world. It is no wonder why so many immigrants seeking economic and social opportunities find their way to The Golden State. However, despite immigrants' vital role in building the state's economy throughout its history, immigrant communities are experiencing large economic inequalities—especially among those who arrive with more limited educational opportunities and low-wage skills. In exploring immigrant integration in California, it is important to consider how immigrants are faring economically and what disparities exist across immigrant groups as a result of inadequate public services, work authorization restrictions, mismatched skills, and a bifurcated labor market.

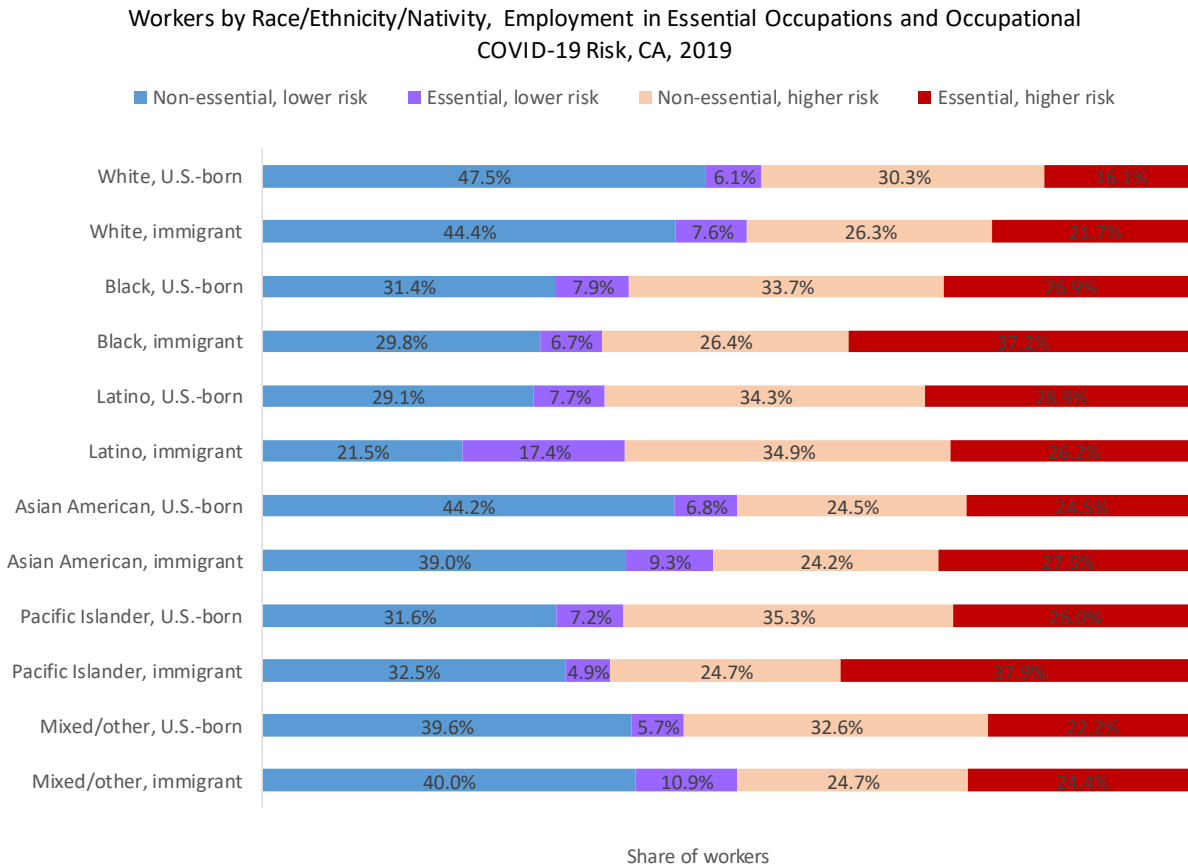
Making up approximately 27 percent of the state's population and 33 percent of the labor force, immigrants in California are a driving force of the economy. Similar to health disparities, the COVID-19

pandemic made clearer how immigrants and communities of color are facing disproportionate economic barriers, consequently making it more difficult to integrate economically and recover from the pandemic. For example, the data shows that undocumented immigrants (57 percent) are nearly twice as likely as the U.S.-born population (29.2 percent) to experience working poverty in 2019. Low wages, limited employment opportunities, and a lack of access to public benefits have all contributed to how marginalized immigrant communities have been in more precarious and economically unstable situations even prior to the pandemic. As community leaders and policymakers in California strategize on how to equitably move forward and build back stronger, it is essential to include immigrants and immigrant communities in these conversations.

Like the rest of the world, California's economy has been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Major layoffs, increased risk of infections among workers, and heightened working poverty are among the several consequences experienced by many across the state. Immigrants and people of color, in particular, are facing challenging circumstances that threaten their livelihood as they are more likely to be working in essential and higher-risk jobs. "Essential" is defined by federal and state guidelines as "must-open" enterprises, including health care, agriculture, logistics, and grocery stores. "High-risk" is measured as having to work in close proximity to others and thus increasing potential exposure.

In California, as shown in Figure 17, an estimated 37.9 percent of Pacific Islander immigrant workers are in essential and high-risk positions. Black immigrant workers share a similar rate at 37.2 percent, followed by U.S.-born Latino workers (28.9 percent), Asian American immigrant workers (27.5 percent), U.S.-born Black workers (26.9 percent), Latino immigrant workers (26.2 percent), U.S.-born Pacific Islander workers (26.0 percent), and U.S.-born Asian American workers (24.5 percent). In contrast, at 16.1 percent, U.S.-born white workers are the least likely to be employed in essential and higher-risk jobs. Immigrant workers, particularly immigrant workers of color, have played a significant role in keeping California's economy afloat despite the high risks of contracting the virus.

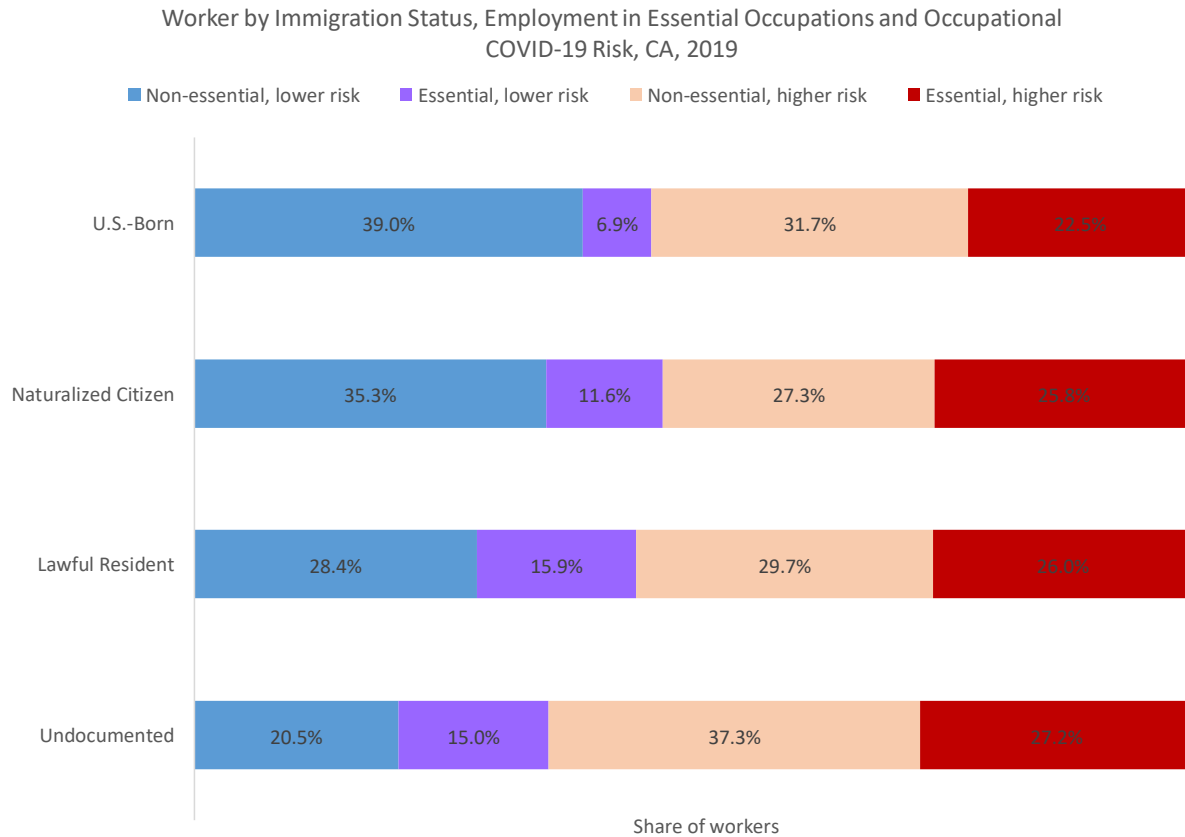
**Figure 17: Worker by Race/Ethnicity/Nativity, Employment in Essential Occupations and Occupational COVID-19 Risk, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of data from the 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and O\*NET. Note: Universe includes employed civilian noninstitutional population age 16 or older in occupations with valid data for the O\*NET physical proximity score. Essential occupations were identified based on an assessment of information from federal and state sources. Higher-risk occupations are defined as having an O\*NET physical proximity score of greater than 3.25. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

When disaggregated by nativity and immigration status, undocumented immigrants (27.2 percent) have the highest rate of work in essential, higher-risk jobs (see Figure 18). Though slightly lower, lawful residents (26 percent) and naturalized citizens (25.8 percent) share similar rates. This is alarming given that undocumented immigrants are also concentrated in labor-intensive work, are the most likely to be without health coverage, and often experience chilling effects in accessing government benefits and services (Capps, Fix, and Batalova 2020).

**Figure 18: Worker by Immigration Status, Employment in Essential Occupations and Occupational COVID-19 Risk, CA, 2019**



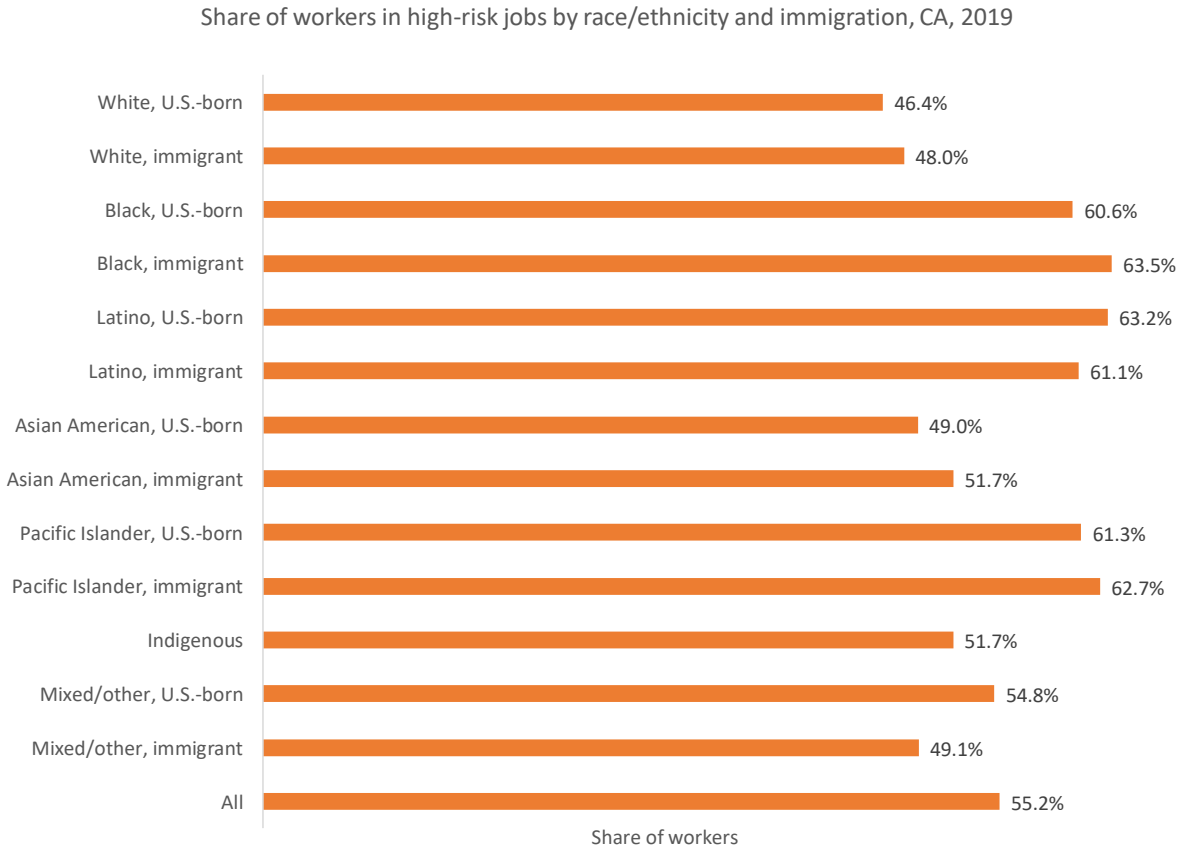
Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of data from the 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA, the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation, and O\*NET. Note: See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and lawful resident population. Universe includes employed civilian noninstitutional population age 16 or older in occupations with valid data for the O\*NET physical proximity score. Essential occupations were identified based on an assessment of information from federal and state sources. Higher-risk occupations are defined as having an O\*NET physical proximity score of greater than 3.25. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

Despite the classifications of “essential” and “non-essential,” it is important to also discuss the significant share of immigrants in high-risk jobs. Workers in high-risk jobs are particularly vulnerable to infections, and thus face health and economic consequences if they were to contract the virus and were unable to work. Though nearly 27 percent of California’s population are immigrants, 33.6 percent of the employed workforce in the state are immigrants with an even greater share in high-risk jobs (41.6 percent). When examining these trends by race/ethnicity, nativity, and immigration status, some groups are more likely than others to be exposed to COVID-19 through their jobs. For example, as shown in Figure 19, among immigrants, Black workers (63.5 percent), Latino workers (61.1 percent), and Pacific Islander workers (62.7 percent) are significantly more likely to be in high-risk positions. In contrast, U.S.-



born white workers (46.4 percent) and white immigrant workers (48.0 percent) are less likely to be working in high-risk positions.

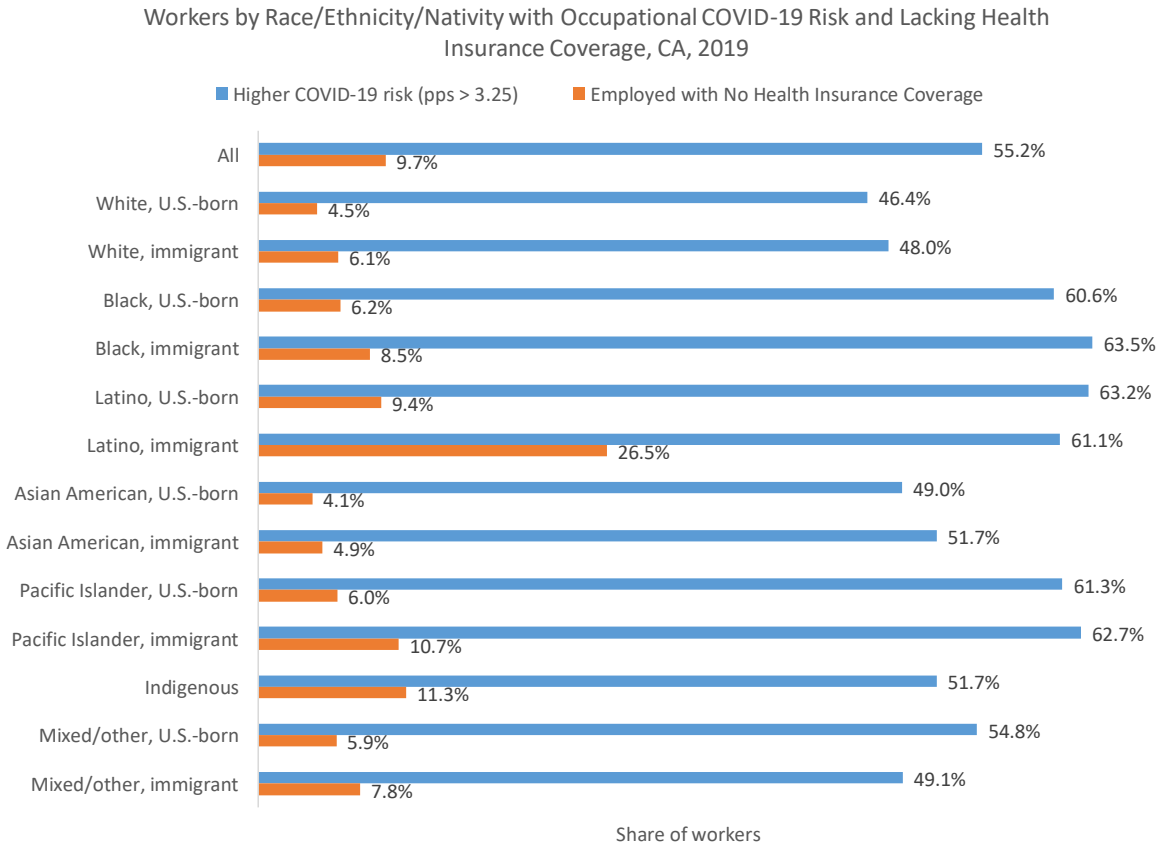
**Figure 19: Share of Workers in High-risk Jobs by Race/Ethnicity/Nativity, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of data from the 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and O\*NET. Note: Universe includes employed civilian noninstitutional population age 16 or older in occupations with valid data for the O\*NET physical proximity score. Essential occupations were identified based on an assessment of information from federal and state sources. Higher-risk occupations are defined as having an O\*NET physical proximity score of greater than 3.25. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

The high rates of immigrant workers in high-risk positions are especially concerning when also considering the low rate of health insurance coverage for some groups. Figure 20 shows that 26.5 percent of Latino immigrant workers do not have health insurance coverage, which is significantly higher than the 9.7 percent of all workers in California.

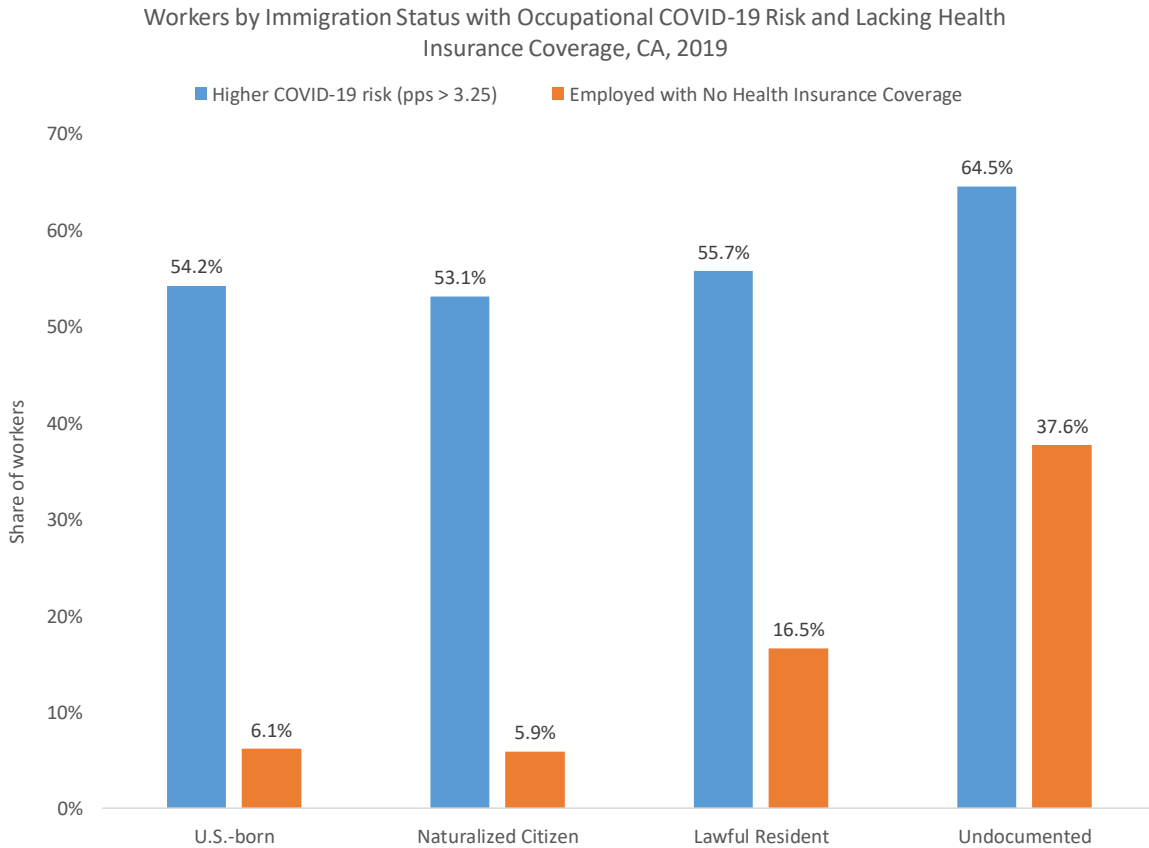
**Figure 20: Workers by Race/Ethnicity/Nativity with Occupational COVID-19 Risk and Lacking Health Insurance Coverage, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes all households (no group quarters). Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

Across nativity and immigration status, undocumented immigrants (64.5 percent) are the most likely to work in high-risk conditions (see Figure 21). However, nearly 40 percent of undocumented immigrant workers in California lack health insurance. Without health insurance, workers face greater economic and health care barriers in addition to facing potential job loss if they become unable to work due to debilitating health conditions. With chilling effects from anti-immigrant policies, like the public charge rule, vulnerable immigrant groups are more likely to lack access to health insurance and health care.

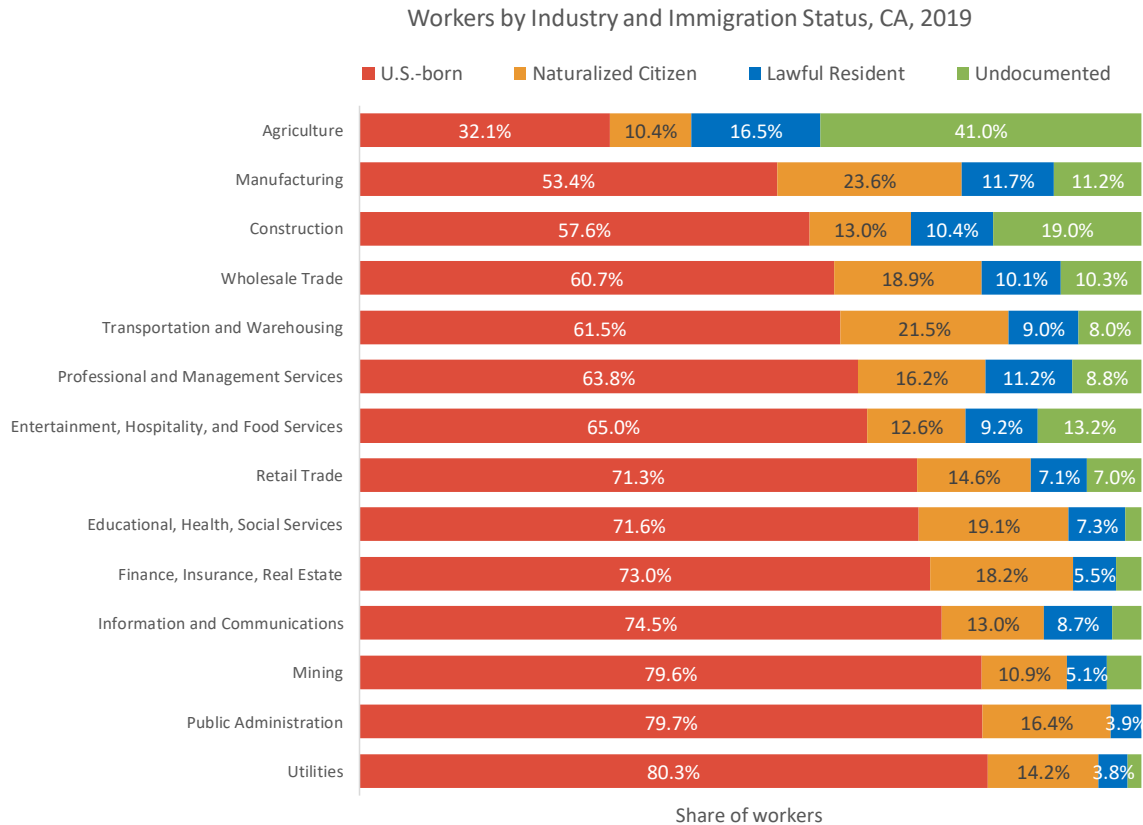
**Figure 21: Workers by Immigration Status with Occupational COVID-10 Risk and Lacking Health Insurance Coverage, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of data from the 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and O\*NET. Note: Universe includes employed civilian noninstitutional population age 16 or older in occupations with valid data for the O\*NET physical proximity score. Essential occupations were identified based on an assessment of information from federal and state sources. Higher-risk occupations are defined as having an O\*NET physical proximity score of greater than 3.25. See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and lawful resident population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

Though immigrants have a presence in all major industries, some industries rely more on immigrant labor than others (see Figure 22). Most notably, California’s agriculture industry has a workforce of nearly 68 percent immigrant workers. Undocumented immigrants make up the most significant share of this industry at 41 percent. Immigrants also make up a sizable portion of the construction (42.4 percent) and manufacturing (46.5 percent) industries. These industries are known for having dangerous working conditions that can contribute to high injury and illness rates. As such, immigrant and labor rights movements have continued to organize in these industries where there is an overrepresentation of immigrants, particularly undocumented immigrants who are at greater risk of exploitation and wage theft due to their status and limited legal options (Smith, Sugimori, and Yasui 2004).

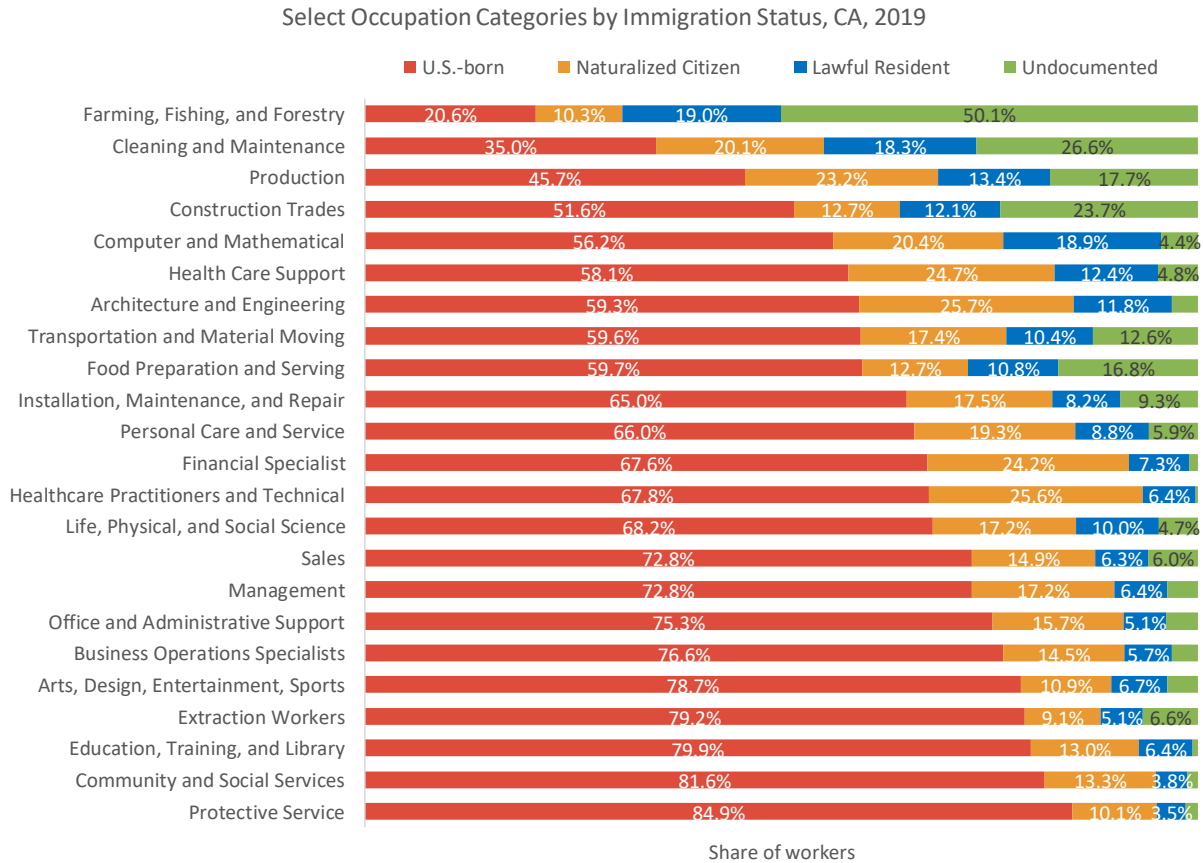
**Figure 22: Workers by Industry and Immigration Status, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: Universe includes the employed civilian non-institutional population age 16 or older. See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and lawful resident population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

Within these industries, immigrants are more likely to fill certain occupations than others. As seen in Figure 23, the occupations where immigrants make up the largest share include farming, fishing, and forestry (79.4 percent); building and grounds cleaning and maintenance (65.0 percent); and production (54.3 percent). Considering the context of the pandemic, we cannot ignore immigrants' contributions to the health of Californians as they make up 32.2 percent of health care practitioners and 41.9 percent of health care support. It is also important to note the strong presence of immigrants in food preparation and serving occupations (40.3 percent) as the industry has been particularly hard hit during the pandemic with restaurant and bar closures. These workers, 16.8 percent of whom are undocumented, face particular economic challenges because they lack job security and a stable source of income.

**Figure 23: Select Occupation Categories by Immigration Status, CA, 2019**



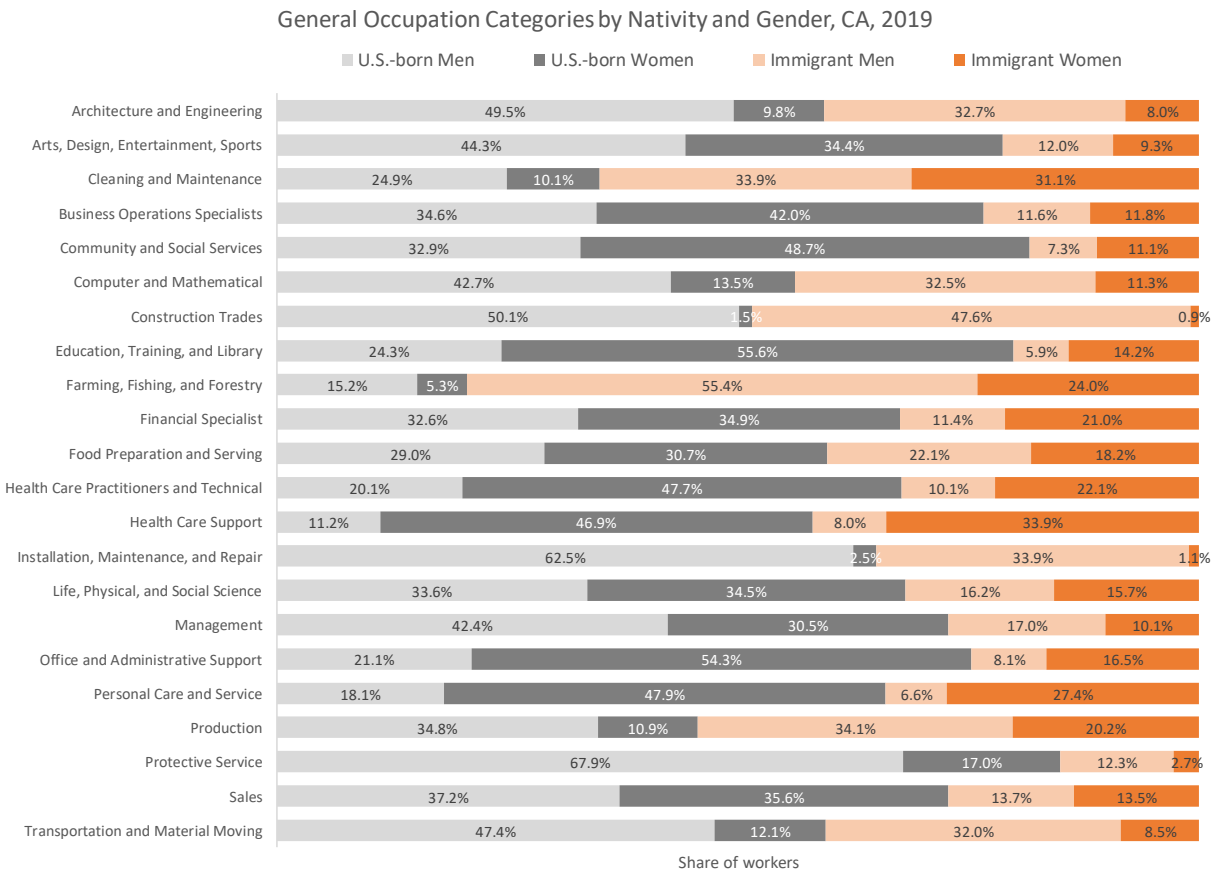
Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: Universe includes the employed civilian non-institutional population age 16 or older. See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and lawful resident population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

Recognizing the immense contributions immigrants have made, local governments and community organizations in California have galvanized funds during the COVID-19 pandemic to aid immigrant workers. The Los Angeles County Office of Immigrant Affairs (OIA), for example, created the Los Angeles Immigrant Essential Workers Initiative in order to draw attention to immigrant workers’ plight since so many were categorized as essential workers and had to continue to work throughout the pandemic (Los Angeles Office of Immigrant Affairs 2020). The initiative launched the “Your Home is Someone Else’s Workplace” campaign to highlight immigrant domestic workers in Los Angeles who are primarily women of color. Given that immigrants, especially those who are undocumented, already face a barrage of workplace barriers and struggles, regions such as Los Angeles quickly began to address the need to provide dedicated resources to their vulnerable immigrant communities.

Though immigrant women make up the smallest share of California’s labor force at less than 15 percent, they have a strong presence in certain occupations. For example, immigrant women make up 31.1

percent of building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations, 27.4 percent of personal care and service, and 24.0 percent of farming, fishing, and forestry jobs (see Figure 24). It is also worth noting that immigrant women are 22.1 percent of health care practitioners and 33.9 percent of health care support.

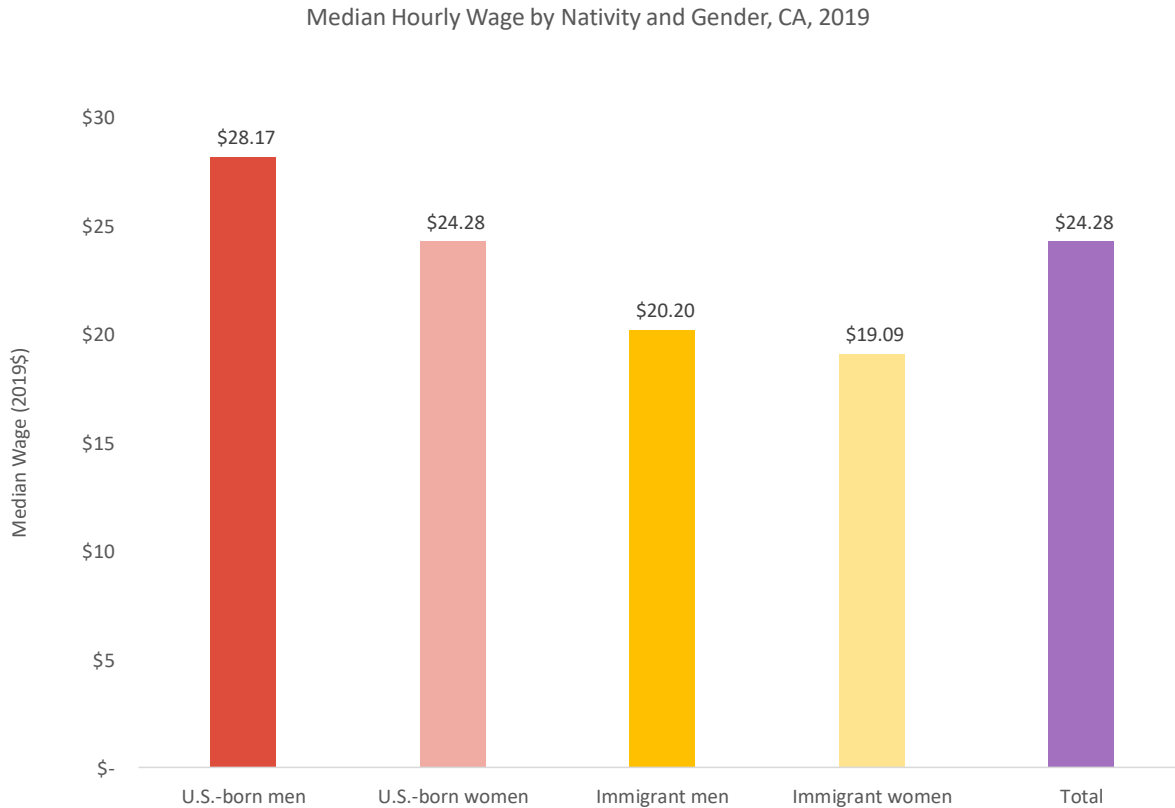
**Figure 24: General Occupation Categories by Nativity and Gender, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes the employed civilian noninstitutional population age 16 or older. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

Among full time workers, as shown in Figure 25, immigrant women have the lowest median hourly wage at approximately \$19.09. This is lower than immigrant men who have a median hourly wage of \$20.20, and much lower than U.S.-born women and U.S.-born men who have a median hourly wage of \$24.28 and \$28.17, respectively.

**Figure 25: Median Hourly Wage by Nativity and Gender, CA, 2019**



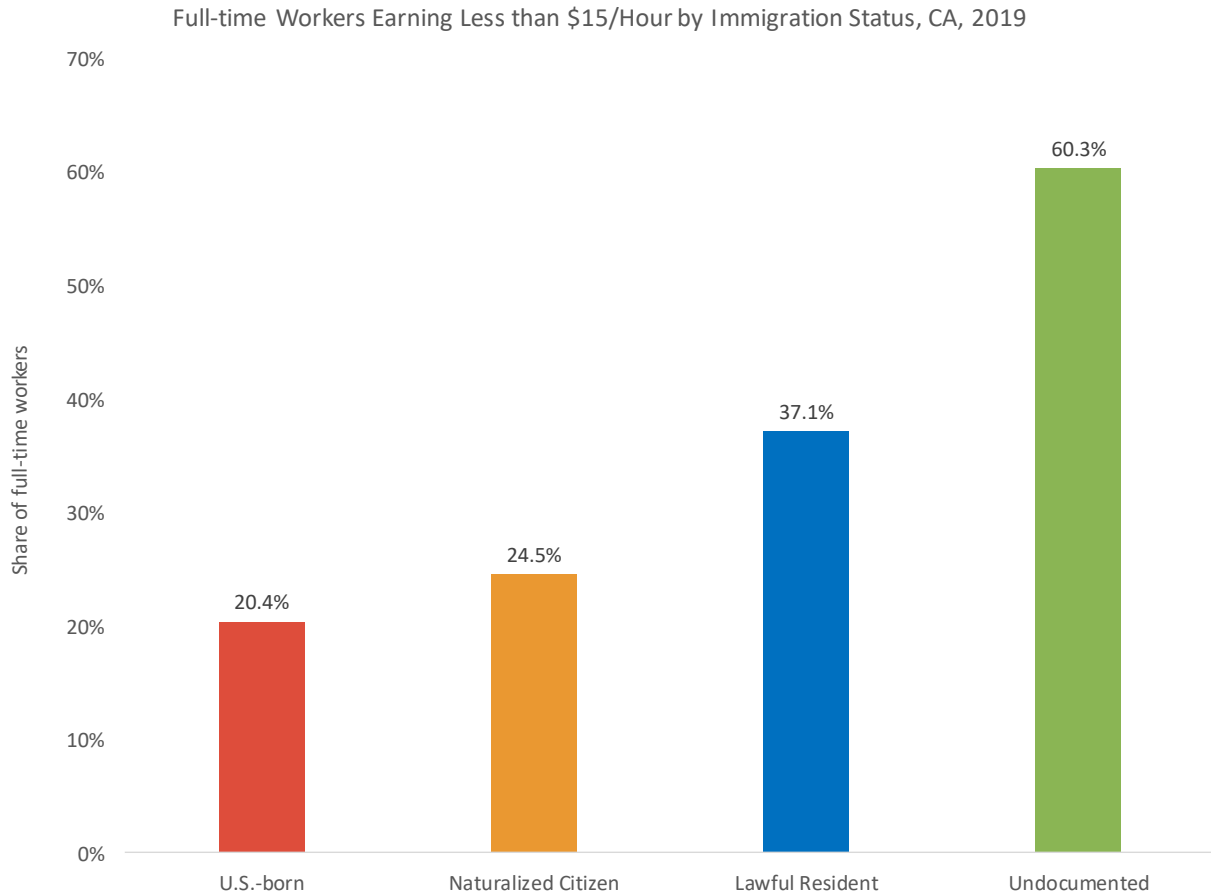
Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes full-time civilian noninstitutionalized wage and salary workers ages 25-64. Values were then adjusted for inflation to reflect 2019 dollars. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

As previous research suggests, these differences in earnings are tied to occupational gender segregation, the devaluation of women’s work (e.g., care work), a bifurcated labor market, and barriers related to immigration status (Batalova 2020; England 1982; Levanon, England, and Allison 2009; Reskin 1993). Again, immigrant women comprise a significant share of workers in high-labor, low-wage occupations, such as cleaning and maintenance and personal care and service. As such, the labor market occupational distribution of immigrant women should be considered when examining the implications of immigration status, race, and educational attainment on earnings for immigrant integration and well-being (Batalova 2020).

Wage disparities are also prevalent across groups by immigration status. This is especially concerning during a pandemic since undocumented immigrants face other challenges due to their immigration status, including accessing certain public benefits and federal relief packages. As shown in Figure 26, among undocumented immigrants working full-time, 60.3 percent make less than \$15 an hour. This makes them significantly more likely to face economic barriers in affording a life in California—one of the costliest states in the country by multiple measures (e.g., housing). In comparison, among full-time

workers, 37.1 percent of lawful residents, 24.5 percent of naturalized citizens, and 20.4% of the U.S. born make less than \$15 an hour.

**Figure 26: Full-time Workers Earning Less than \$15/Hour by Immigration Status, CA, 2019**



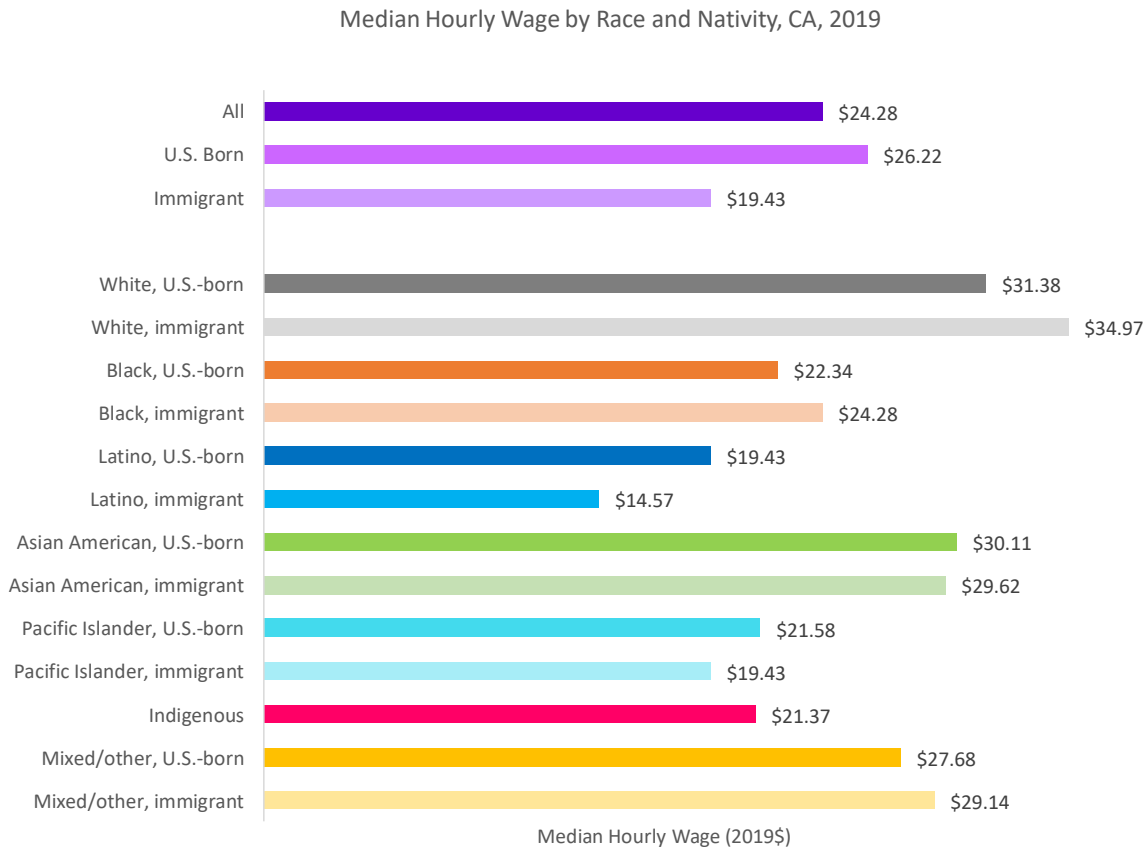
Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: Universe includes full-time civilian noninstitutionalized wage and salary workers ages 25-64. Values were then adjusted for inflation to reflect 2019 dollars. See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and lawful resident population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

Similar concerns arise when looking at hourly wages across different racial/ethnic groups (see Figure 27). Latino immigrants have the lowest median hourly wage at \$14.57. Not only is this lower than their U.S.-born Latino counterparts (\$19.43), it is much lower than other immigrant groups, such as Pacific Islander immigrants (\$19.43), Black immigrants (\$24.28), Asian American immigrants (\$29.62), and white immigrants (\$34.97). This further spotlights the economic insecurities experienced by the Latino immigrant community in an increasingly unaffordable state. Latino immigrants have constrained employment outlooks given their educational attainment levels and limited English proficiency (Hill 2011), which can partially explain their large presence in high-labor, low-wage jobs that excludes them from quality jobs providing a living wage, job advancement, health care coverage, and additional



benefits. Undocumented immigrants, who are primarily Latino, face further precarious circumstances as employers may be noncompliant to labor and wage laws (Orrenius and Zavodny 2010).

**Figure 27: Median Hourly Wage by Race and Nativity, CA, 2019**



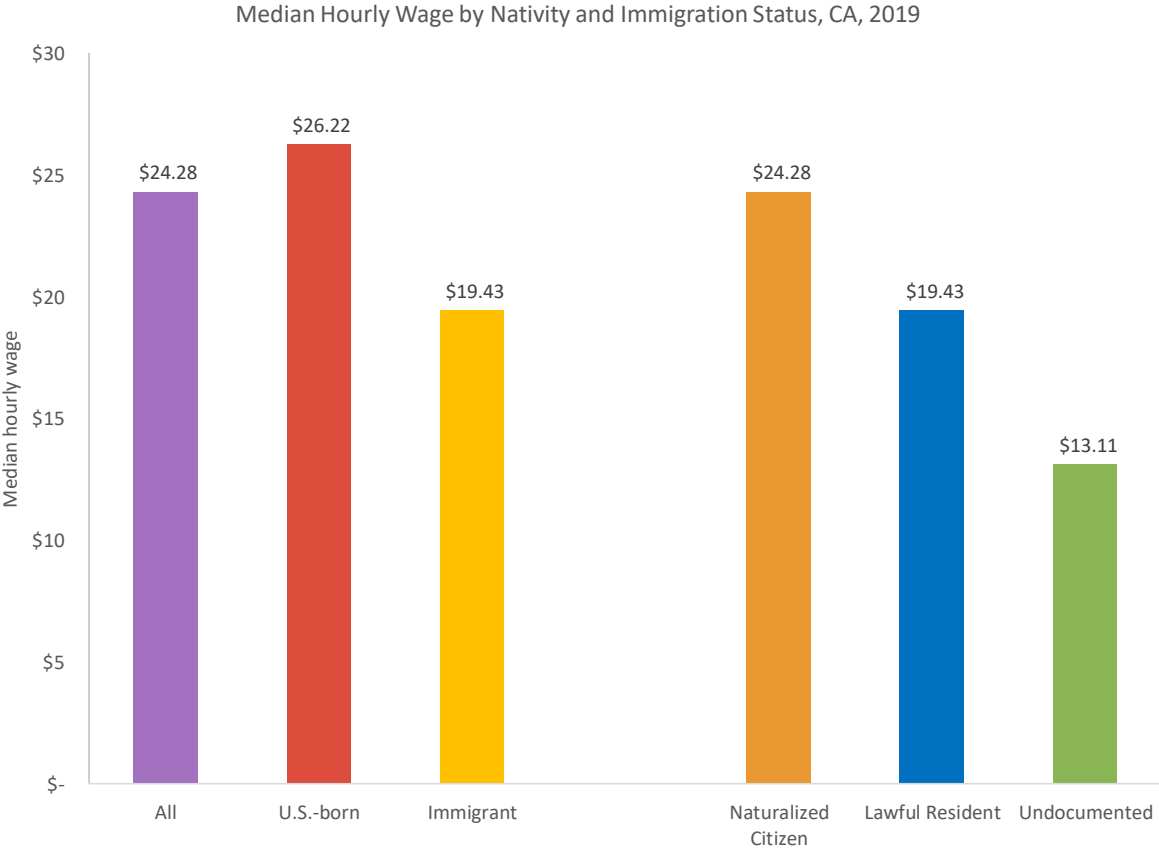
Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes full-time civilian noninstitutionalized wage and salary workers ages 25-64. Values were then adjusted for inflation to reflect 2019 dollars. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

Immigrants’ wages in California have remained relatively stagnant over time, whereas the median hourly wage for U.S.-born workers in the state, albeit higher, slightly decreased. In 2000, the median hourly wage for immigrant workers was approximately \$19. This was substantially lower than U.S.-born workers’ median hourly wage of about \$28 (USC Equity Research Institute 2020). By 2019, as shown in Figure 28, immigrants’ median hourly wage was closer to \$19.50 while U.S-born workers’ median hourly wage dropped to about \$26. Though the wage gap closed slightly, there remains a significant wage disparity between immigrant and U.S.-born workers.

Even more stark is the wage disparity experienced across immigrant workers. When disaggregated by immigration status, the median hourly wage for undocumented immigrants is \$13.11. These earnings are especially low when considering the high cost of living in California. According to the Living Wage calculator, created by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), an adult working full-time

without any children in California would have to make \$18.66 per hour in wages in order to support themselves (MIT 2020). For adults working full-time with children, the hourly wage required to survive is much higher. The cost of living in California is much higher than the earnings of undocumented immigrants in the state, signaling potential widespread economic hardships for the undocumented population.

**Figure 28: Median Hourly Wage by Nativity and Immigration Status, CA, 2019**



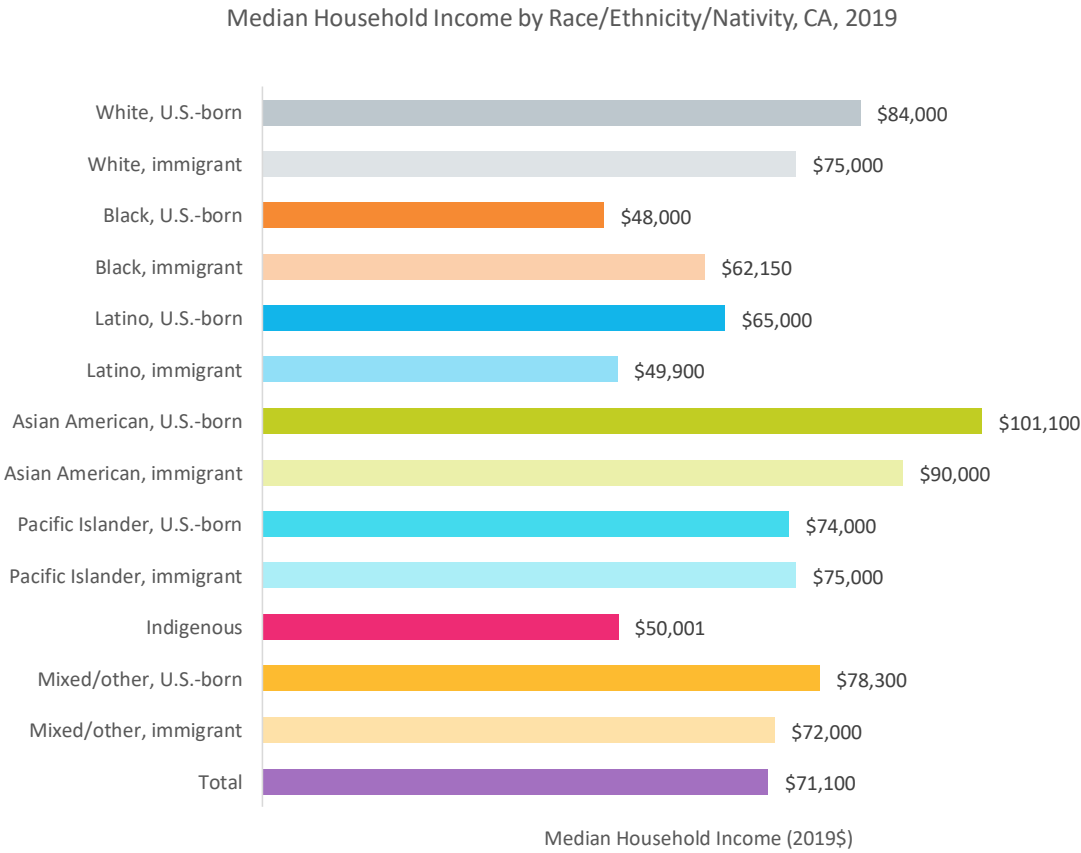
Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes full-time civilian noninstitutionalized wage and salary workers ages 25-64. Values were then adjusted for inflation to reflect 2019 dollars. See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and lawful resident population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

These wage disparities are also evident when examining household income across race/ethnicity and immigration status. According to our estimates, U.S.-born-headed households have a median household income of \$76,000 compared to immigrant-headed households' \$62,000. As shown in Figure 29, the gap is starker when disaggregating by race/ethnicity. Among immigrant-headed households, Latinos have the lowest median household income at \$49,900, whereas Asian American immigrants have the highest at \$90,000. In most cases, immigrant-headed households earn less than their U.S.-born counterparts with the exceptions of Black immigrants and Pacific Islander immigrants. Households headed by Pacific

Islander immigrants (\$75,000) have a median household income \$1,000 greater than their U.S.-born counterparts.

Households headed by Black immigrants have a median household income of \$62,150, approximately \$14,150 more than households headed by U.S.-born Black individuals. Looking at educational attainment provides some insight into these differences as 43.5 percent of Black immigrants in California have a bachelor’s degree or higher, levels that outpace those of U.S.-born Black Americans (24.7 percent). However, despite Black immigrants’ educational attainment, they continue to face discrimination in the labor market (Tesfai and Thomas 2020). As the data shows, immigrants are facing different economic challenges compared to their U.S.-born counterparts, also often racialized.

**Figure 29: Median Household Income by Race/Ethnicity/Nativity, CA, 2019**

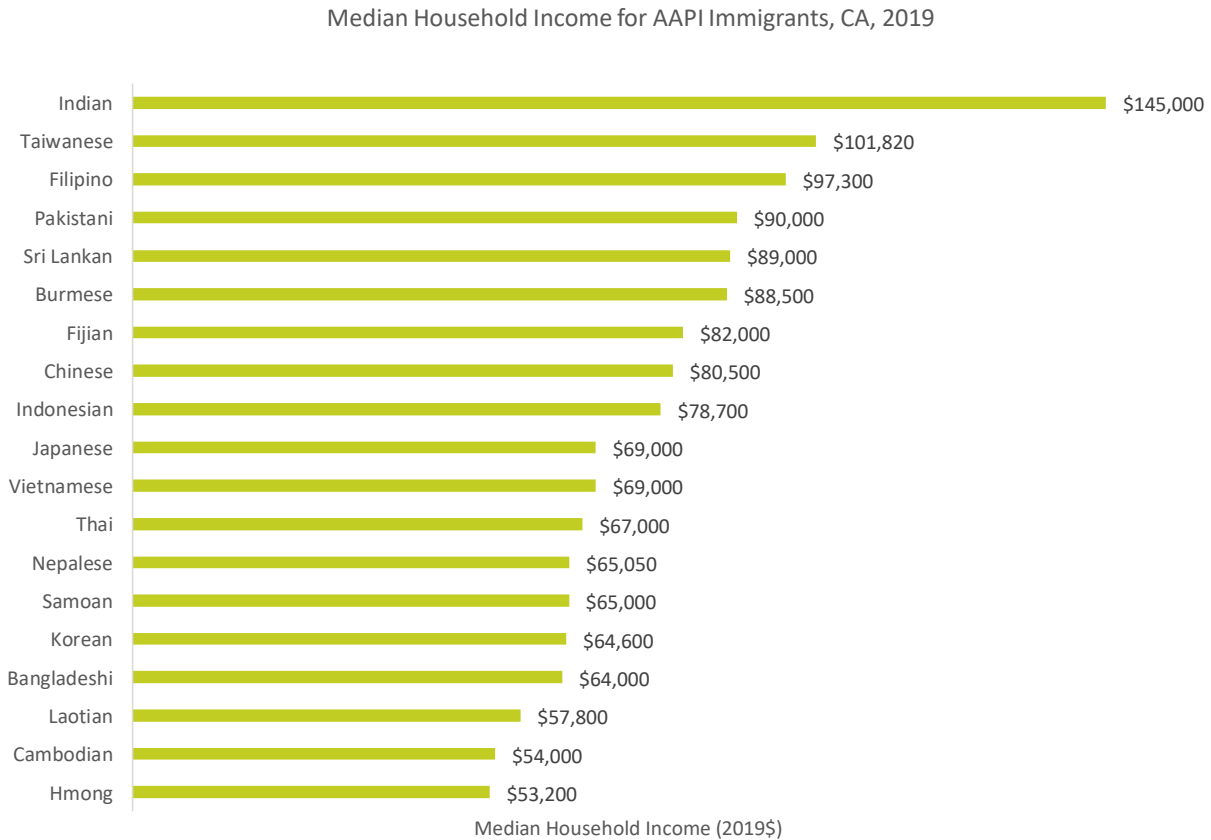


Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes all households (no group quarters). Values were then adjusted for inflation to reflect 2019 dollars. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

Further disaggregation shows how groups within the Asian American immigrant community are experiencing vastly different economic conditions (see Figure 30). Among immigrant-headed households, Indian households have the highest median household income (\$145,000), followed by Taiwanese households (\$101,820) and Filipino households (\$97,300). This is in stark contrast with households headed by Laotian immigrants (\$57,800), Cambodian immigrants (\$54,000), and Hmong

immigrants (\$53,200). Like within the larger immigrant community, the Asian American immigrant community is diverse in many ways, including their levels of educational attainment and skills.

**Figure 30: Median Household Income for AAPI Immigrants, CA, 2019**



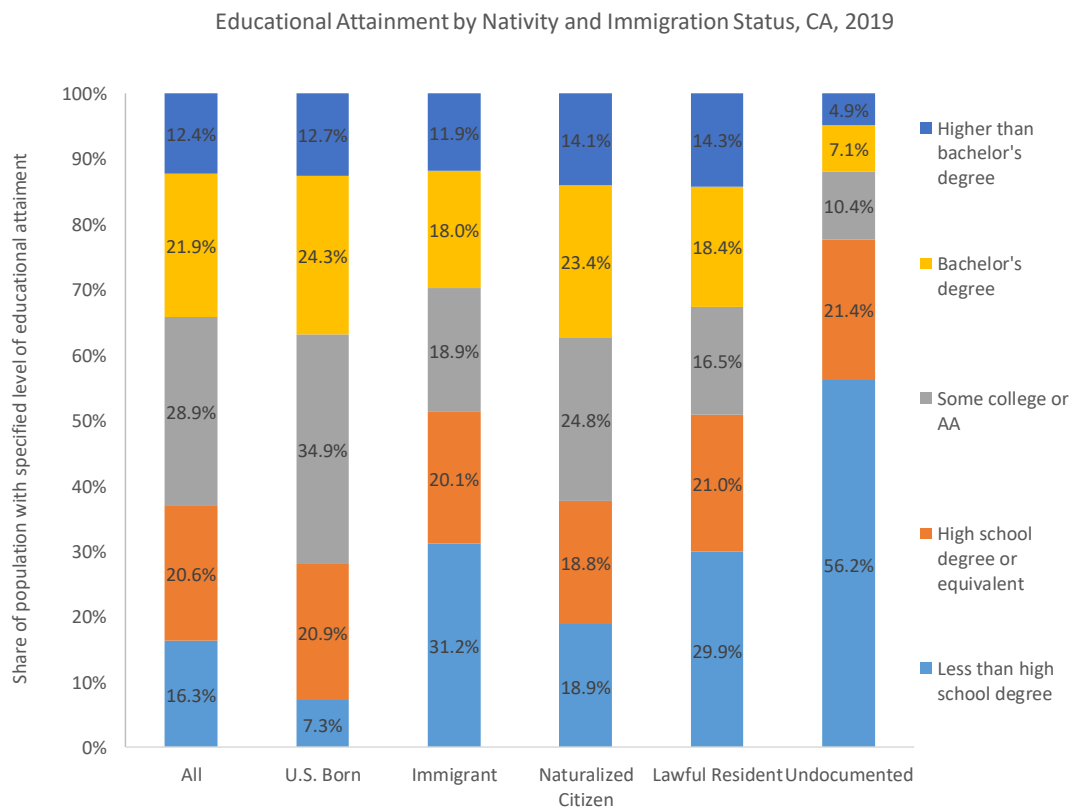
Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes all households (no group quarters). Values were then adjusted for inflation to reflect 2019 dollars. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

For example, as we find and discuss later in this section, Cambodian immigrants are less likely to be educated than most other Asian American immigrant groups in California. Since educational attainment is a strong factor regarding employment status and earnings, Cambodian immigrants' lower education levels can help explain their lower median household income in comparison to other Asian American immigrants. Again, such heterogeneity is important to extrapolate as it helps to explain why such disparities in immigrants' economic mobility exist.

Disparities in educational attainment within and across immigrant communities are connected to several factors, including recency of arrival, status concerns, language barriers, and income. Compared to the U.S.-born population, immigrants have lower levels of educational attainment (see Figure 31). In California, 31.2 percent of working-age immigrants (ages of 25 and 64) have less than a high school degree. In comparison, only 7.3 percent of the U.S.-born population have less than a high school education. The U.S.-born population (37.0 percent) is also more likely than the immigrant population

(29.9 percent) to have at least a bachelor’s degree. There are significant educational differences by immigration status. Undocumented immigrants are vastly more likely to have less than a high school degree (56.2 percent) and the least likely to have at least a bachelor’s degree (12.0 percent). In comparison, 37.5 percent of naturalized citizens and 32.7 percent of lawful residents have at least a bachelor’s degree.

**Figure 31: Educational Attainment by Nativity and Immigration Status, CA, 2019**

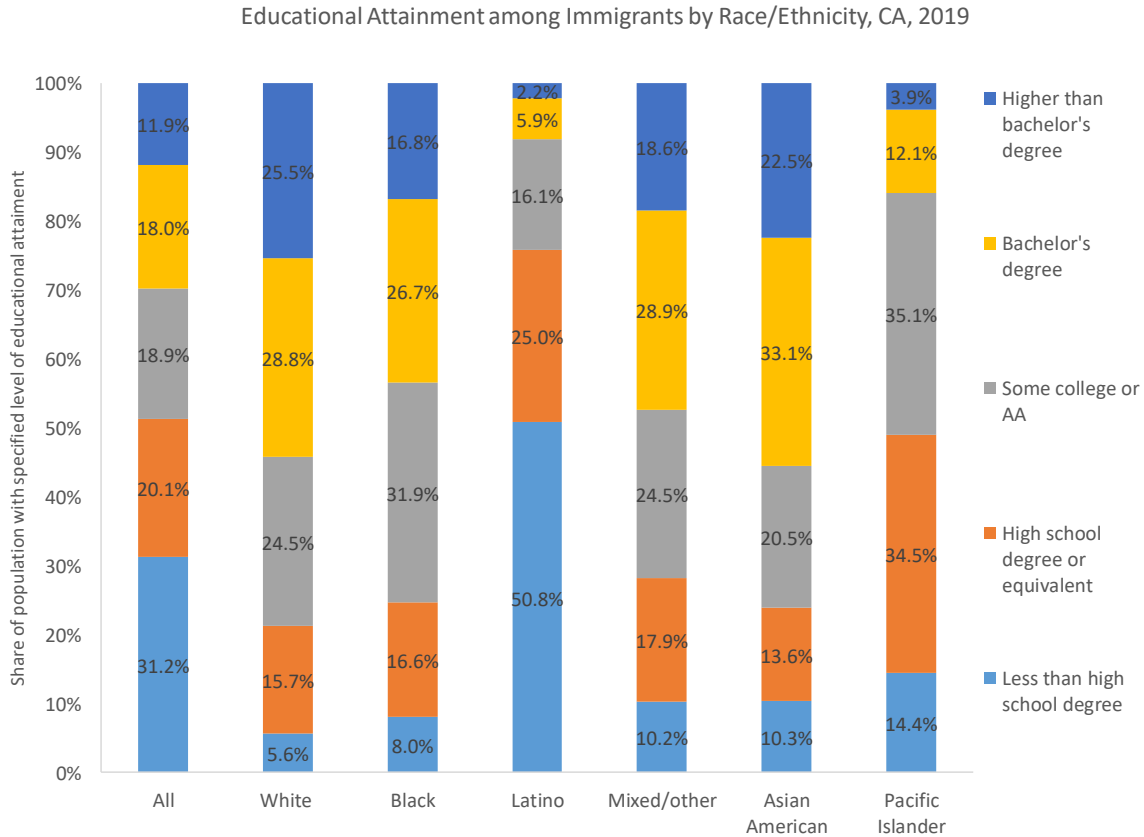


Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: Universe includes all persons ages 25 through 64. See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and lawful resident population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

Disaggregating by race/ethnicity also shows stark differences in educational attainment among immigrants. Figure 32 shows that about half of Latino immigrants between the ages of 25 and 64 have less than a high school education, which is true of only 5.6 percent of white immigrants, 8.0 percent of Black immigrants, 10.3 percent of Asian American immigrants, 10.2 percent of Other/mixed-race immigrants, and 14.4 percent of Pacific Islander immigrants. Asian American immigrants (55.6 percent) and white immigrants (54.3 percent) are the most likely to have at least a bachelor’s degree, followed by Other/mixed-race immigrants (47.5 percent), Black immigrants (43.5 percent), Pacific Islander immigrants (16.0 percent), and Latino immigrants (8.1 percent). Latino immigrants are the most likely to have limited educational attainment, which could contribute to lower wages, fewer job opportunities,

limited career mobility, and stagnant wages (Capps et al. 2003; Orrenius and Zavodny 2010; Shambaugh et al. 2017).

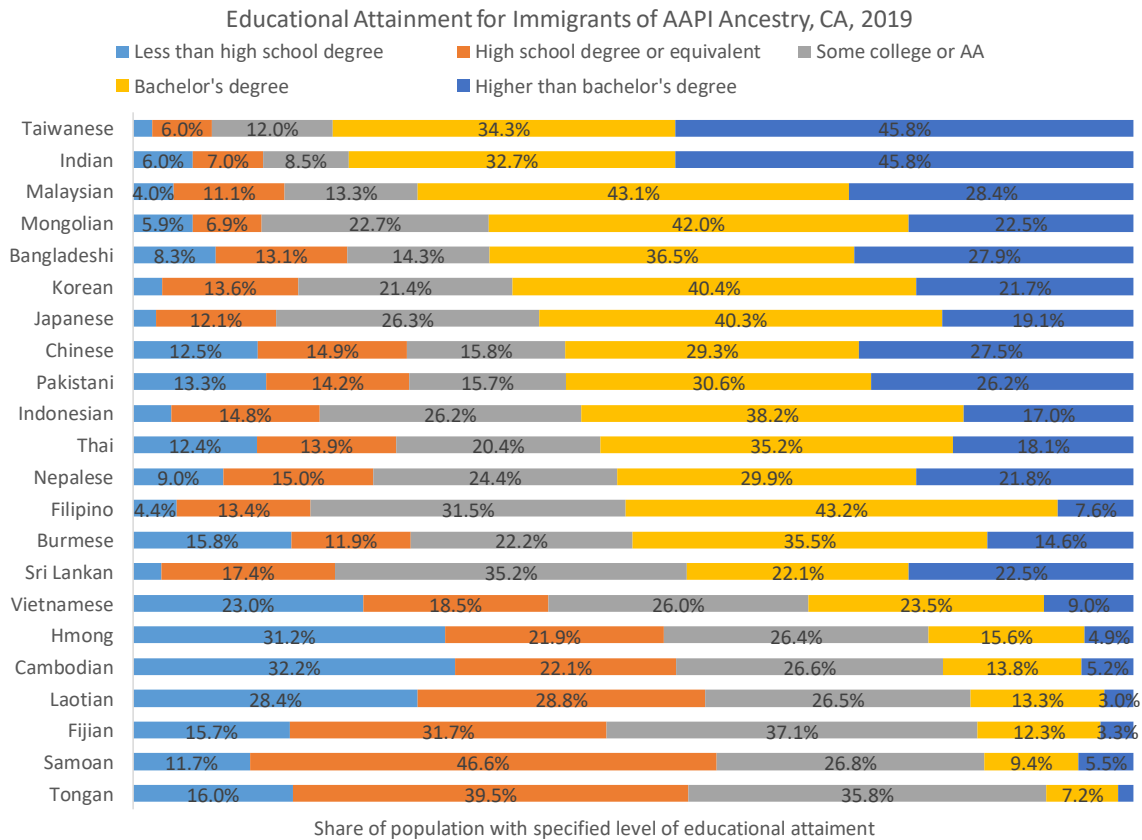
**Figure 32: Educational Attainment among Immigrants by Race/Ethnicity, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Data represent a 2015-2019 average. Note: Universe is all people ages 25-64. Data also available on the California Immigrant Data Portal, <https://immigrantdataca.org/indicators/educational-attainment#/?breakdown=3>.

When disaggregating Asian American immigrant data, similar disparities exist for educational attainment. Figure 33 shows that the Asian American immigrant groups most likely to be at least college-educated are Taiwanese (80.1 percent) and Indian (78.5 percent), whereas the groups least likely to have a bachelor's degree or higher include Laotian (16.3 percent), Cambodian (19.0 percent), Hmong (20.5 percent), and Vietnamese (32.5 percent) immigrants. By another measure, 32.2 percent of Cambodian immigrants, 31.2 percent of Hmong immigrants, and 28.4 percent of Laotian immigrants have less than a high school degree. Again, considering California's growing and increasingly diverse Asian American immigrant population, there are stark differences that are important to highlight. These differences within the Asian American immigrant community explain why some groups are more economically integrated than others.

**Figure 33: Educational Attainment among Immigrants of AAPI Ancestry, CA, 2019**



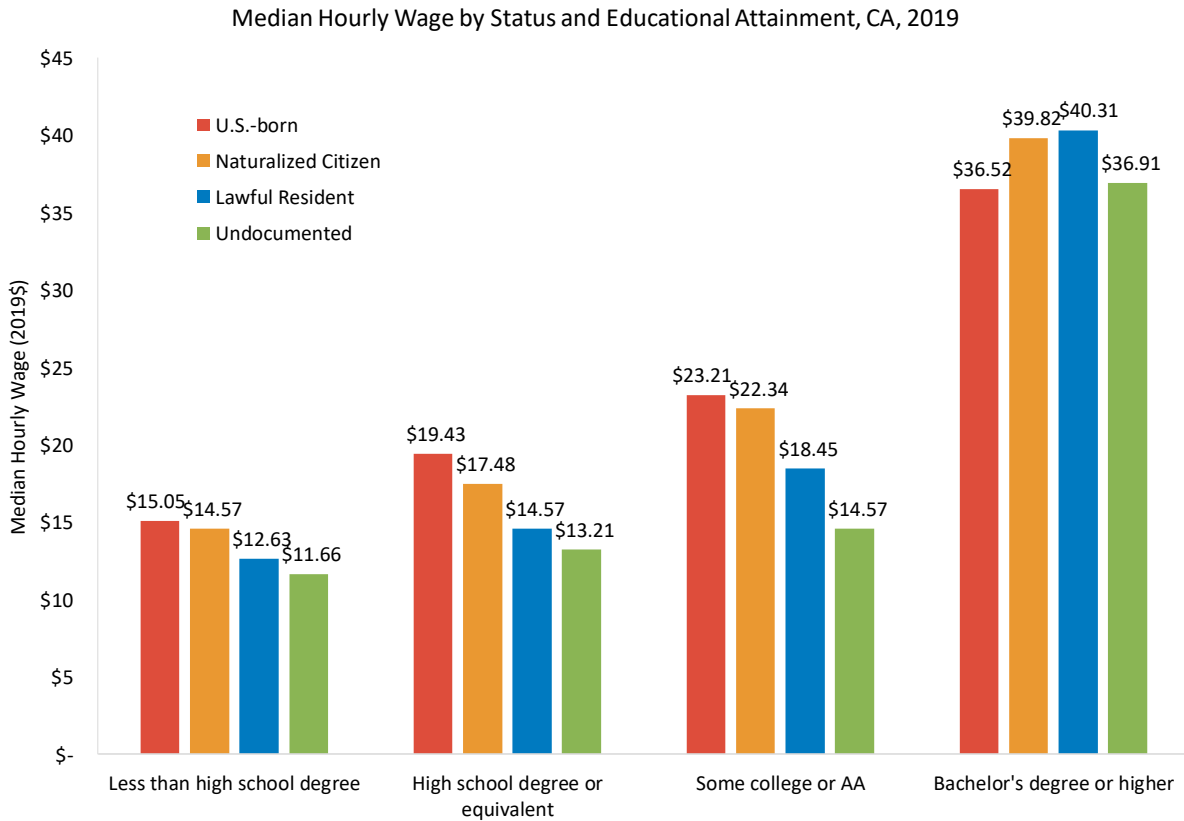
Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Data represent a 2015-2019 average. Note: Universe is all people ages 25-64. Data also available on the California Immigrant Data Portal, <https://immigrantdataca.org/indicators/educational-attainment#/?breakdown=3>.

To further highlight the role of education in an immigrant’s economic integration, we can look at how wage varies by status and educational attainment (see Figure 34). The data shows that compared to immigrants with the same status, on average, immigrants with higher educational attainment earn a higher median hourly wage. The most notable gains are for immigrants who earn a bachelor’s degree or higher. The median hourly wage for naturalized citizens with a bachelor’s degree or higher is nearly \$40, which is about \$22 greater than the median hourly wage for naturalized citizens with only a high school degree. Undocumented immigrants with a bachelor’s degree or higher (\$36.91) also experience a significant gain in their wage earnings. Though education seems to mitigate the wage gap, disparities still exist by nativity and immigration status among those who have the same level of education.

Lawful residents with a bachelor’s degree or higher (\$40.31) see a larger jump in their median hourly wage compared to their counterparts with just a high school degree (\$14.57) and some college (\$18.45). This, however, is driven by highly educated H-1B visa holders in high paying jobs. When examining these two groups separately, lawful permanent residents (LPRs) with bachelor’s degrees or higher have a median hourly wage of \$34.48 whereas H-1B visa holders have a median hourly wage of \$48.56. This is

important to distinguish as certain sectors in California rely significantly on H-1B visa holders. We estimate that though California accounts for approximately 12.2 percent of the U.S. population, 22.4 percent of all U.S. H-1B visa holders reside in California.

**Figure 34: Median Hourly Wage by Status and Educational Attainment, CA, 2019**

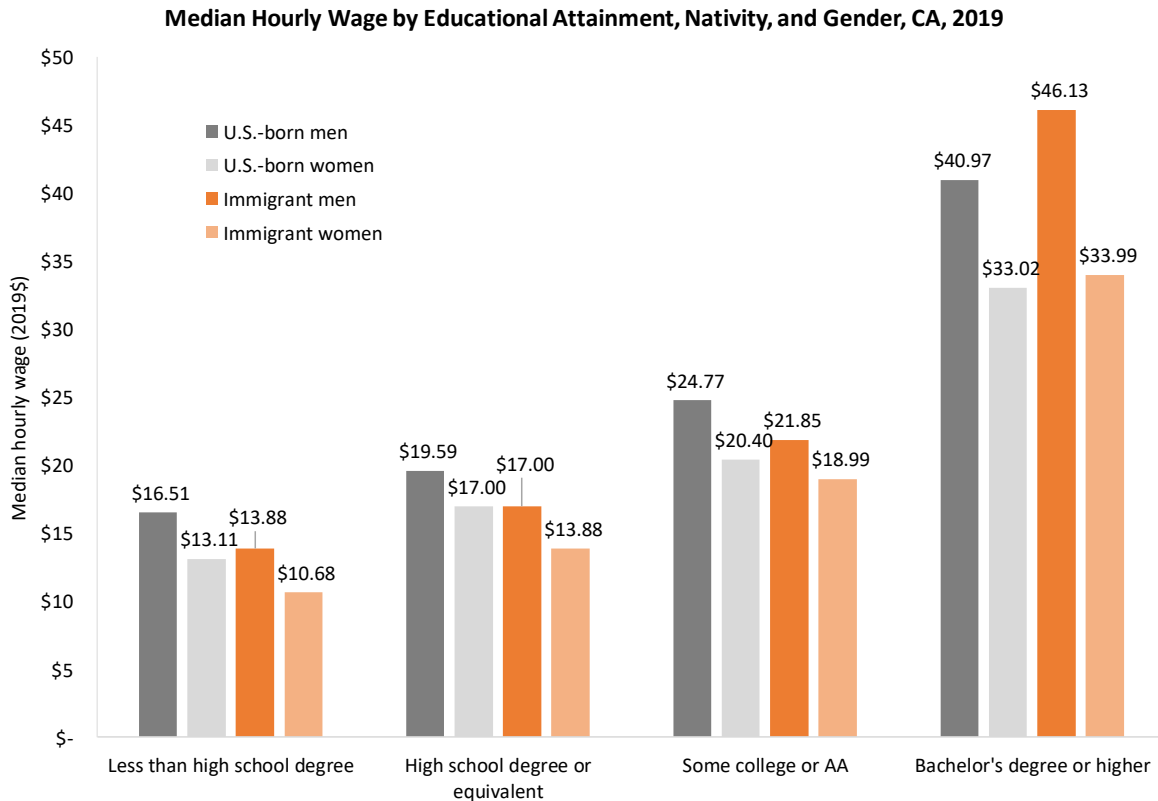


Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Data represent a 2015-2019 average. Note: Universe includes civilian non-institutional full-time wage and salary workers ages 25 through 64. Values are in 2019 dollars. See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and lawful resident population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

Though education, on average, helps immigrants close the wage gap with their U.S.-born counterparts, the gender wage gap persists across levels of educational attainment. For example, Figure 35 shows that even though immigrant women with a bachelor's degree or higher (\$33.99) have a median hourly wage similar to their U.S.-born counterparts (\$33.02), it is still significantly less than the median hourly wage of immigrant men (\$46.13) and U.S.-born men (\$40.97) with the same education. Occupational gender segregation, gender discrimination, and its multiplicative effects with race and nativity have been found to be significant drivers sustaining the gender wage gap even among highly-educated women working in high-skill jobs (Purkayastha 2005; Quadlin 2018).



**Figure 35: Median Hourly Wage by Educational Attainment, Nativity, and Gender, CA, 2019**

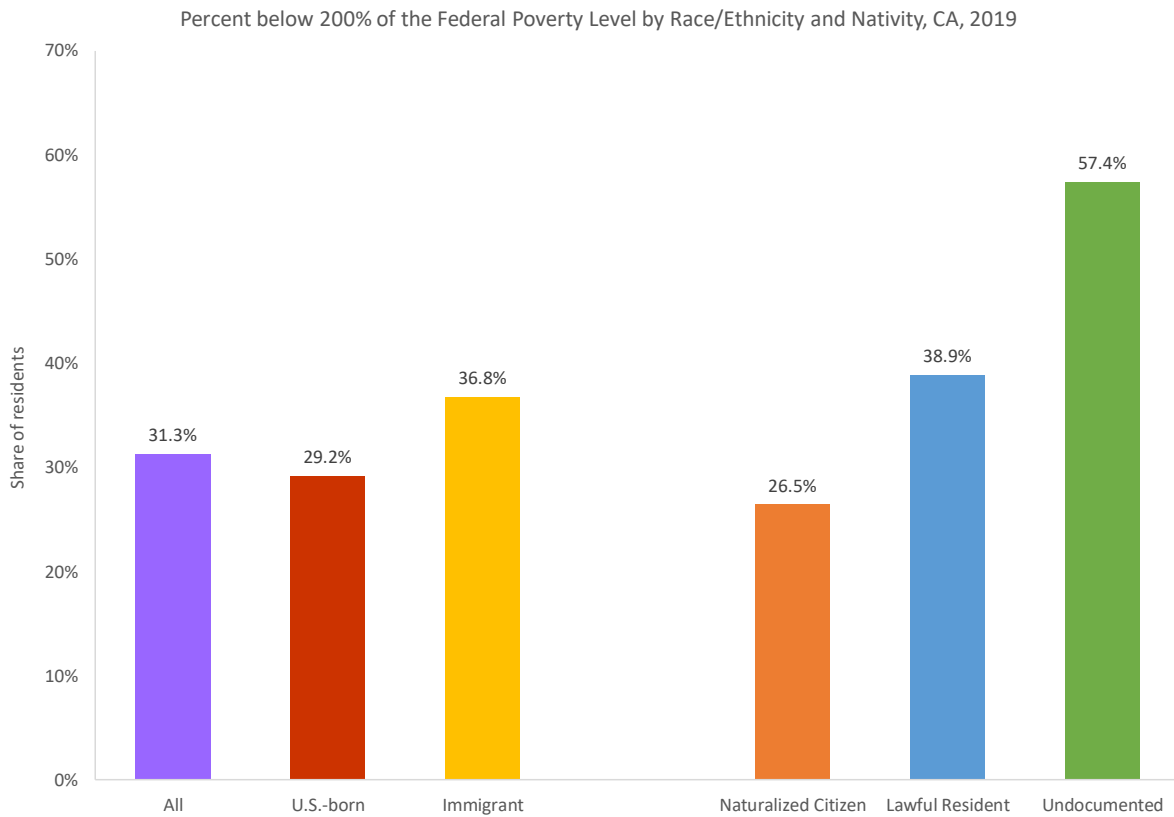


Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Data represent a 2015-2019 average. Note: Universe includes civilian non-institutional full-time wage and salary workers ages 25 through 64. Values are in 2019 dollars.

Immigrants in California have been experiencing greater levels of economic stress and insecurity. We define economic insecurity as having a family income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Though individuals may technically be above the federal poverty line, they may still not have enough money to cover basic needs like housing, food, childcare, and transportation. This is especially likely in California where goods and services like housing are much costlier than most of the country. Figure 36 shows that in California, 36.8 percent of immigrants live below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, compared to 29.2 percent of the U.S.-born population. By immigration status, a higher share of undocumented immigrants (57.4 percent) live in poverty compared to lawful residents (38.9 percent) and naturalized citizens (26.5 percent).

Beyond access to fair pay and employment, the many barriers that undocumented immigrants face when trying to access public benefits and services also contribute to this higher rate of poverty. Undocumented immigrants have been limited in terms of their eligibility for certain federal and state public benefits, in addition to a general mistrust and fear of interacting with government agencies stemming from past anti-immigrant policies and enforcement that have targeted undocumented immigrants and their families (Page et al. 2020).

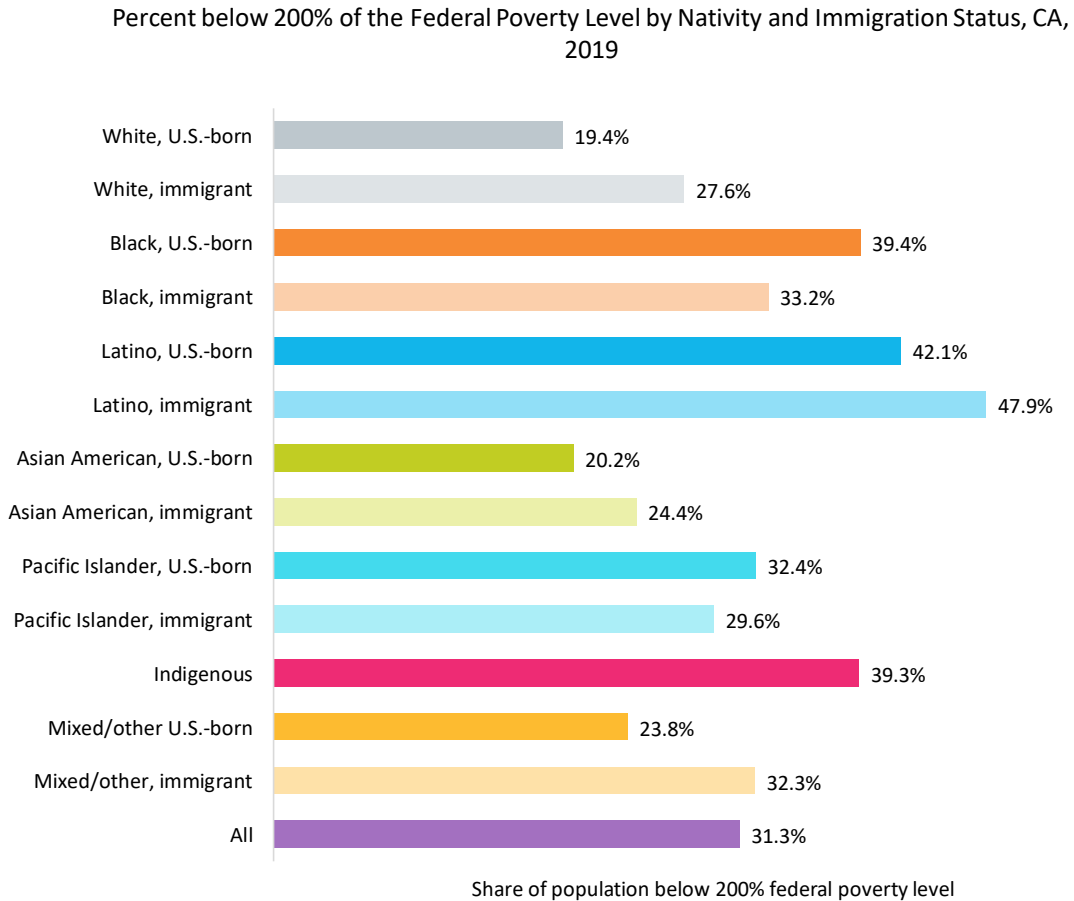
**Figure 36: Percent below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level by Race/Ethnicity and Nativity, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: Universe includes all persons not in group quarters. See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and lawful resident population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

While immigrants are more likely to experience higher rates of poverty and economic insecurity, disparities across race/ethnicity are also stark. In Figure 37, disaggregation by race/ethnicity and nativity shows that Latino immigrants (47.9 percent) have the highest rate of poverty followed by U.S.-born Latinos (42.1 percent). Immigrants are more likely to live in poverty than their U.S.-born counterparts, with the exception of Black immigrants and Pacific Islander immigrants. While 33.2 percent of Black immigrants live below 200 percent of the federal poverty line, nearly 40 percent of U.S.-born Black Californians are living in poverty. Similarly, 29.6 percent of Pacific Islander immigrants live in poverty compared to 32.4 percent of their U.S.-born counterparts. People of color and immigrants experience higher rates of economic insecurity that have been likely exacerbated by the pandemic. Whether it is paying for groceries, rent, or other basic needs, living in poverty leaves certain groups in a more precarious situation during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic—especially those lacking job security and access to public benefits. In these circumstances, struggling communities—immigrant or not—rely on state and local governments to provide public infrastructure and safety nets to survive.

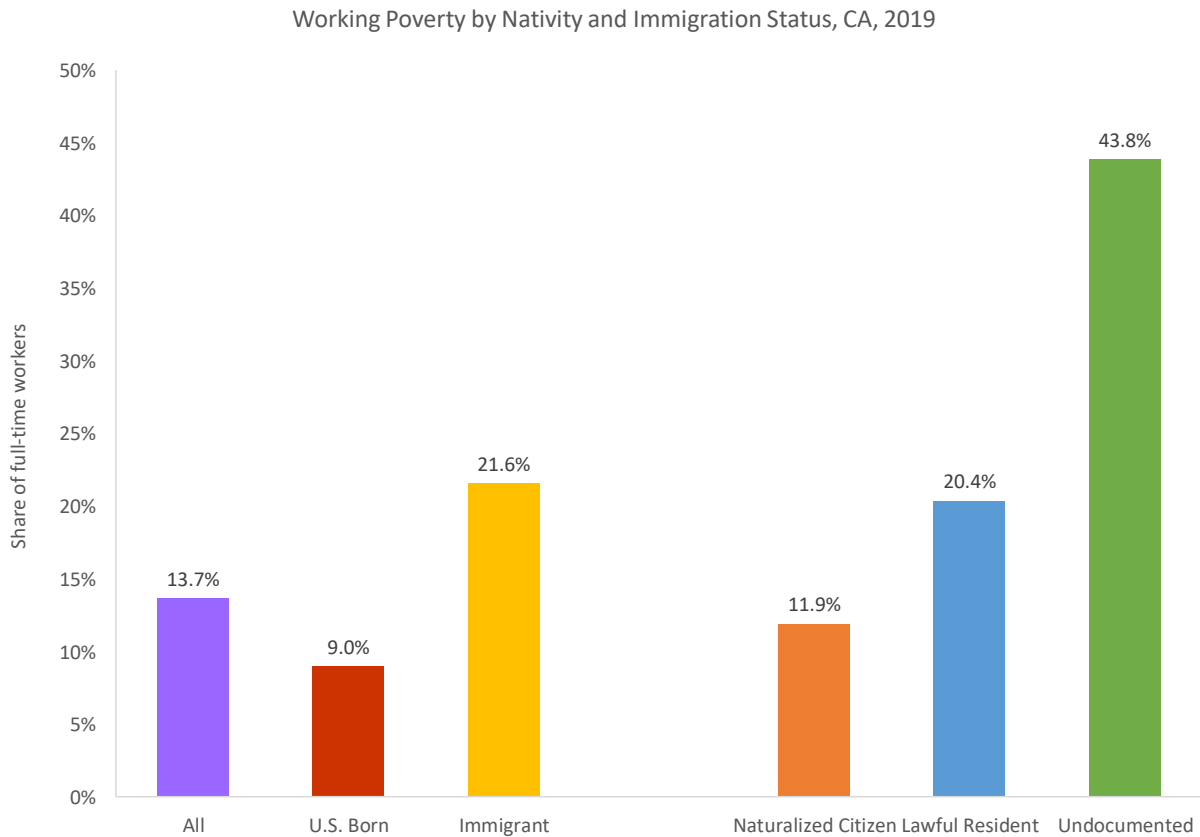
**Figure 37: Percent below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level by Nativity and Immigration Status, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes all persons not in group quarters. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

Another measure that reflects the challenges to immigrant integration is working poverty. Working poverty (i.e., ‘working poor’) is defined as full-time workers whose family income is below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Figure 38 shows that immigrants are facing higher rates of working poverty and that this difference is most stark for undocumented immigrants: 43.8 percent experience working poverty. This is three times the working poverty rate for the overall population and nearly five times the rate of their U.S.-born counterparts. About 20.4 percent of lawful residents and 11.9 percent of naturalized citizens are experiencing working poverty.

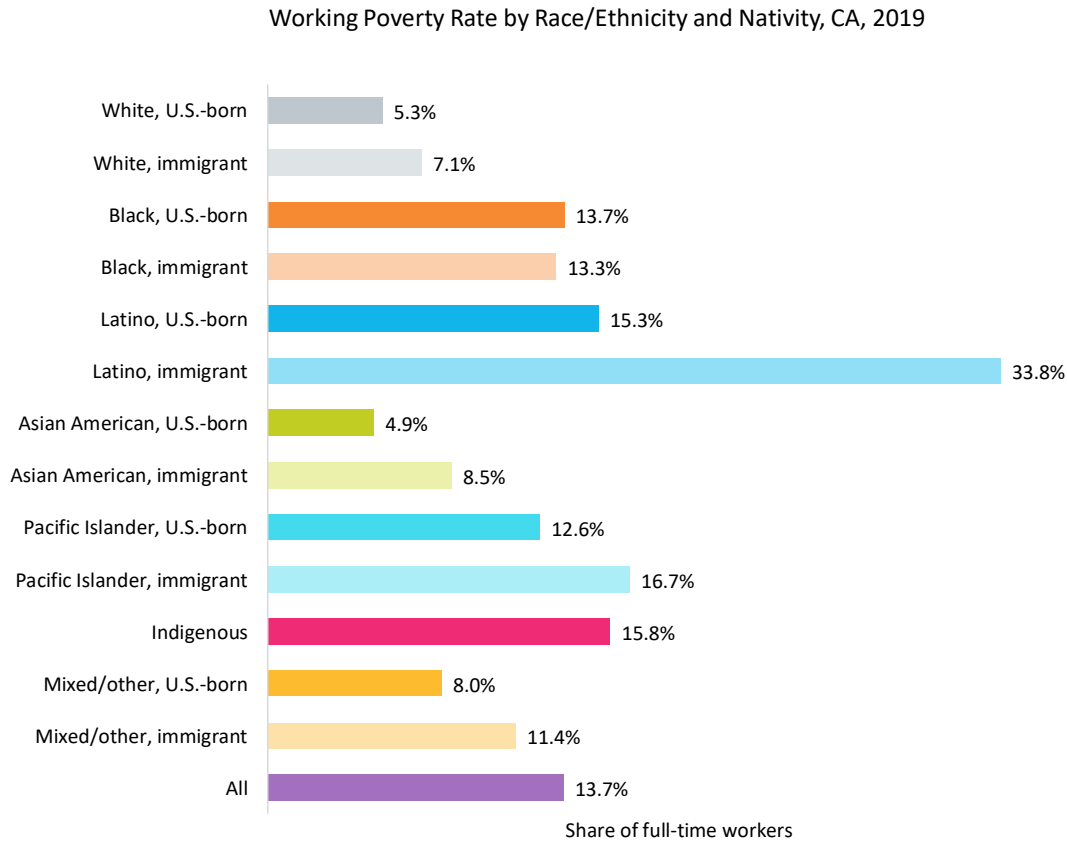
**Figure 38: Working Poverty by Nativity and Immigration Status, CA, 2019**



Source: Working poverty is defined as full-time workers whose family income is below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: Universe includes the civilian non-institutional population ages 25-64 not living in group quarters who worked at all during the year prior to the survey. See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and lawful resident population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

Immigrants of all races/ethnicities are more likely than their U.S.-born counterparts to experience working poverty (see Figure 39). The exceptions are Black immigrant workers (13.3 percent) who have a slightly lower rate than U.S.-born Black workers (13.7 percent). Latino immigrants (33.8 percent) are the most likely to experience working poverty, followed by Pacific Islander immigrants (16.7 percent) and U.S.-born Latino workers (15.3 percent). Though white immigrants (7.1 percent) and Asian American immigrants (8.5 percent) have higher rates of working poverty than their U.S.-born counterparts (5.3 percent and 4.9 percent, respectively), their rates are lower than U.S.-born workers of other races/ethnicities—with the exception of Other/mixed race (8.0 percent). This further suggests that immigrants are facing racialized barriers to their economic mobility.

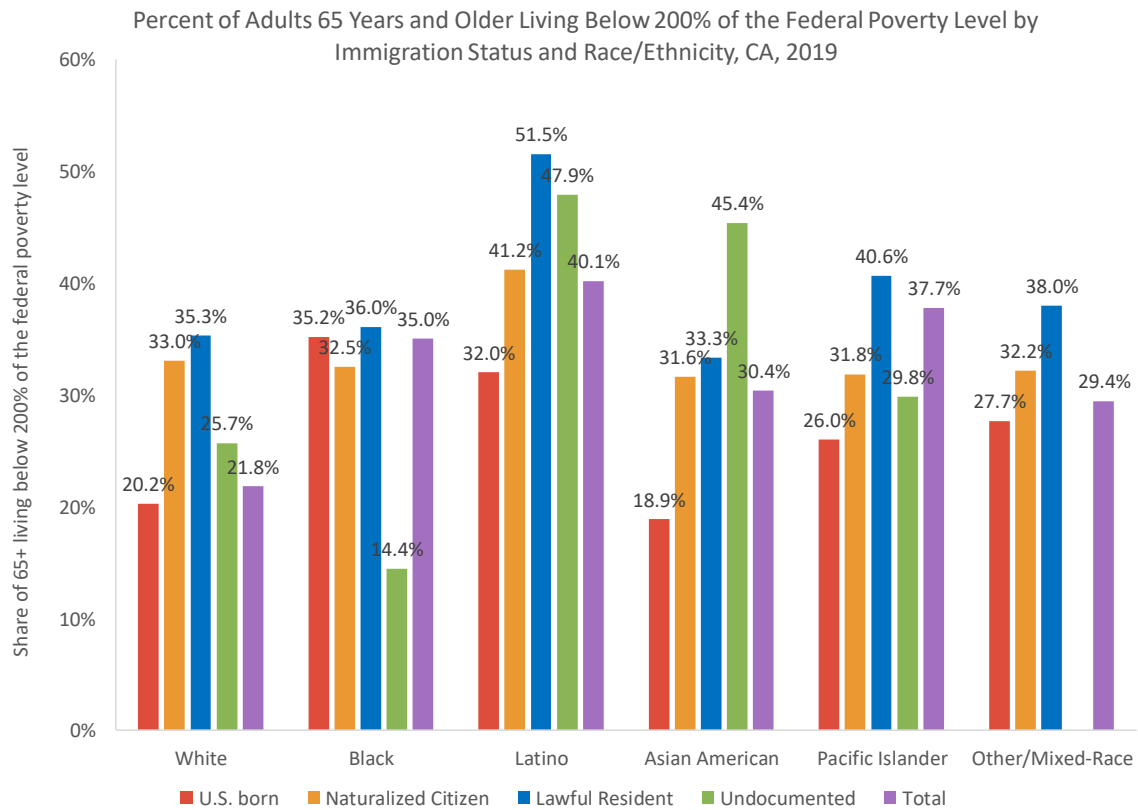
**Figure 39: Working Poverty Rate by Race/Ethnicity and Nativity, CA, 2019**



Source: Working poverty is defined as full-time workers whose family income is below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes the civilian non-institutional population ages 25-64 not living in group quarters who worked at all during the year prior to the survey. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

The older immigrant population may be particularly vulnerable during the pandemic because of their age, limited English proficiency, and potential economic insecurity. Figure 40 shows that among seniors, 40.1 percent of Latinos live below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, the highest of any group. However, when disaggregated by immigration status, there are several groups that exceed this rate: Latinos who are naturalized citizens (41.2 percent), lawful residents (51.5 percent), and undocumented immigrants (47.9 percent); undocumented Asian American immigrants (45.4 percent); and Pacific Islander lawful residents (40.6 percent). This is especially concerning during the pandemic as economic insecurities could force the aging immigrant population to remain in the labor force past retirement, adding to COVID-19 exposure risk (Center for Social Innovation 2019; NBC News 2014; Phan and Selassie 2021). Undocumented senior immigrants who have greater barriers in accessing public benefits and assistance may feel this pressure most acutely.

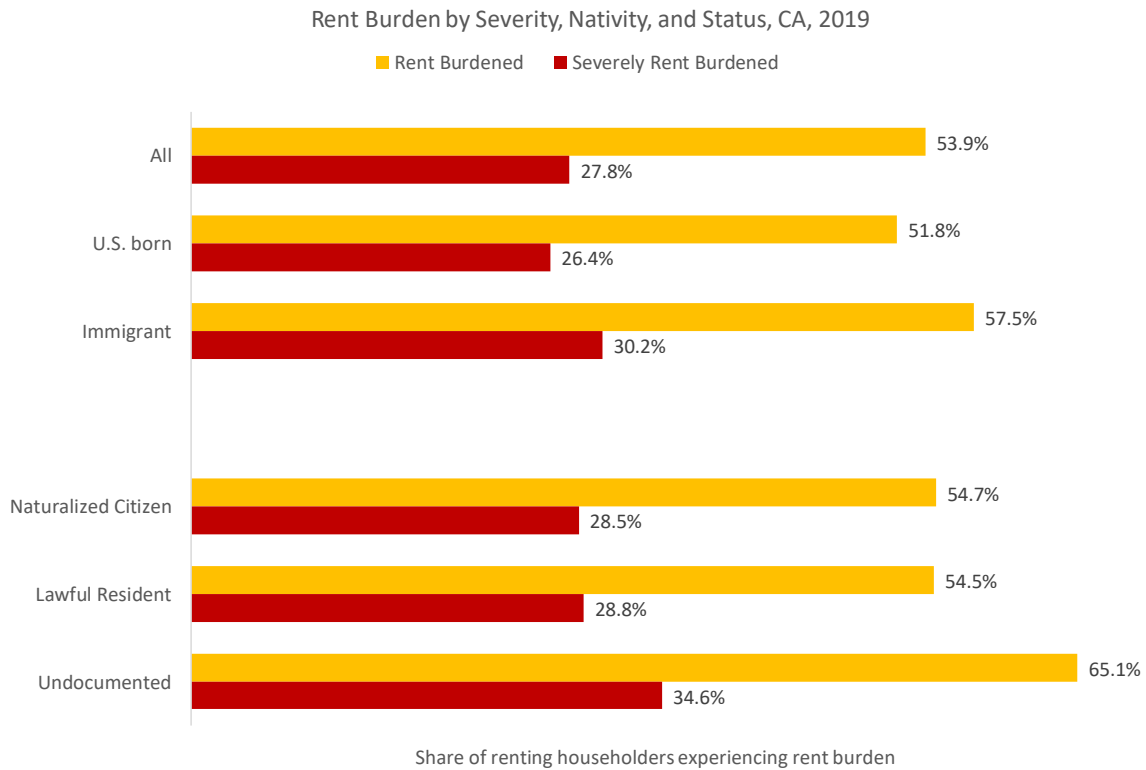
**Figure 40: Percent of Adults 65 years and Older Living Below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level by Immigration Status and Race/Ethnicity, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: Universe includes adults age 65 or older. See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and lawful resident population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

California is infamous for its rising housing prices and rent, making it more difficult for many to find affordable housing. Rent burden is defined as paying 30 percent or more of their income towards rent and utilities. Figure 41 shows that in California, 57.5 percent of immigrant-headed households are rent burdened compared to 51.8 percent of households headed by U.S.-born renters. Immigrants are also more likely to be severely rent burdened (i.e., paying 50 percent or more of their income towards rent and utilities). Over 30.2 percent of California’s immigrant-headed households are severely rent burdened compared to 26.4 percent of the state’s households headed by U.S.-born renters. The disparities are starker when examining across immigration status. Household headed by undocumented immigrants are the most likely to be rent burdened (65.1 percent) and severely rent burdened (34.6 percent). This is not surprising considering undocumented immigrants, as mentioned previously, have the lowest median hourly wage (\$13.11) and are the most likely to experience working poverty (43.8 percent).

**Figure 41: Rent Burden by Severity, Nativity and Status, CA, 2019**

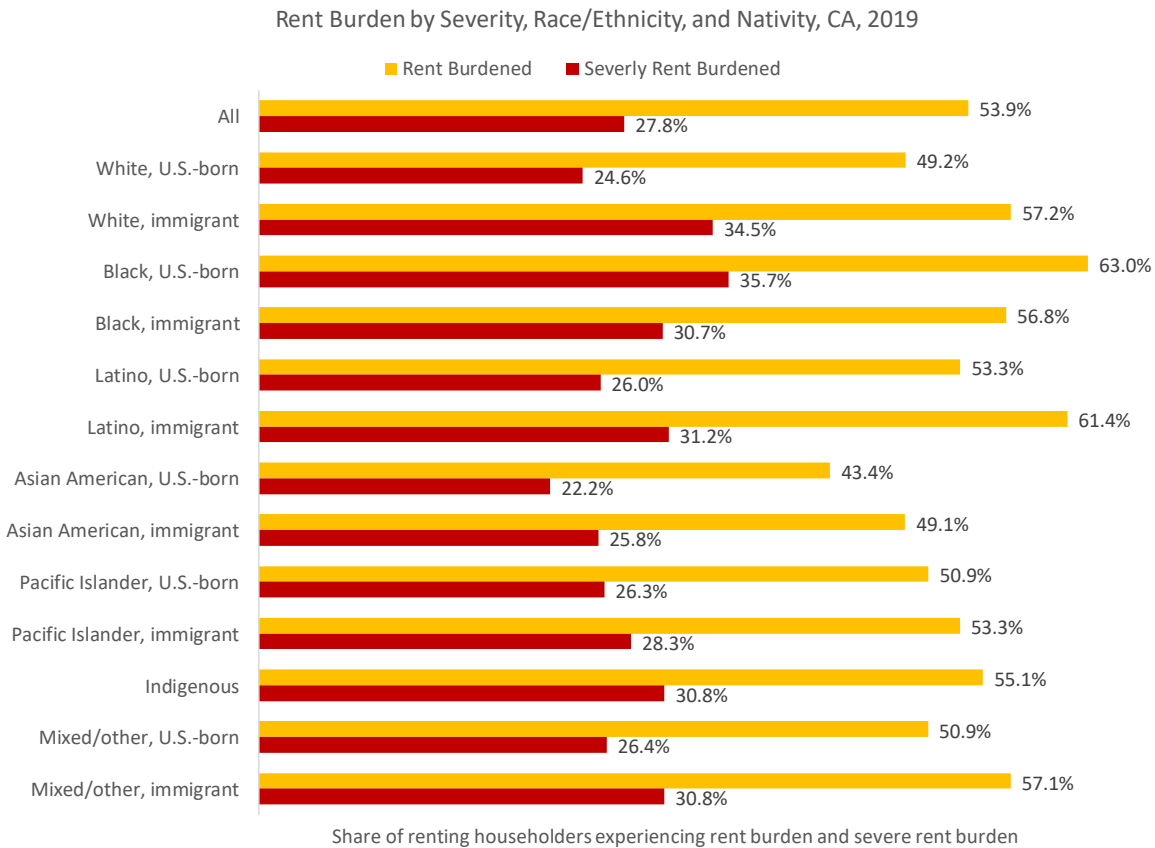


Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: Universe includes renter-occupied households with cash rent (excludes group quarters). Rent burden is defined as spending more than 30 percent of income on rent and utilities and severely rent burden as spending more than 50 percent. See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and lawful resident population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

Paying higher shares of one’s income towards rent and mortgages often means less income towards other needs, like groceries, health care, and child care. Being burdened with housing costs also creates more difficulty for residents to prepare for emergencies, like the COVID-19 pandemic, which often leads households to be more vulnerable to evictions if they lose their source of income or face other costly emergencies.

Overall, 53.9 percent of households in California are rent burdened, but disaggregated data by race/ethnicity and immigration status show how some immigrant groups are more likely to struggle making rent (see Figure 42). U.S.-born Black renters (63.0 percent), Latino immigrants (61.4 percent), white immigrants (57.2 percent), Black immigrants (56.8 percent), and Other/mixed-race immigrants (57.1 percent) are the most likely to be rent burdened. These same groups, with the addition of Pacific Islander immigrants (28.3 percent), also face severe rent burdens at higher rates than the overall state population (27.8 percent).

**Figure 42: Rent Burden by Severity, Race/Ethnicity, and Nativity, CA, 2019**

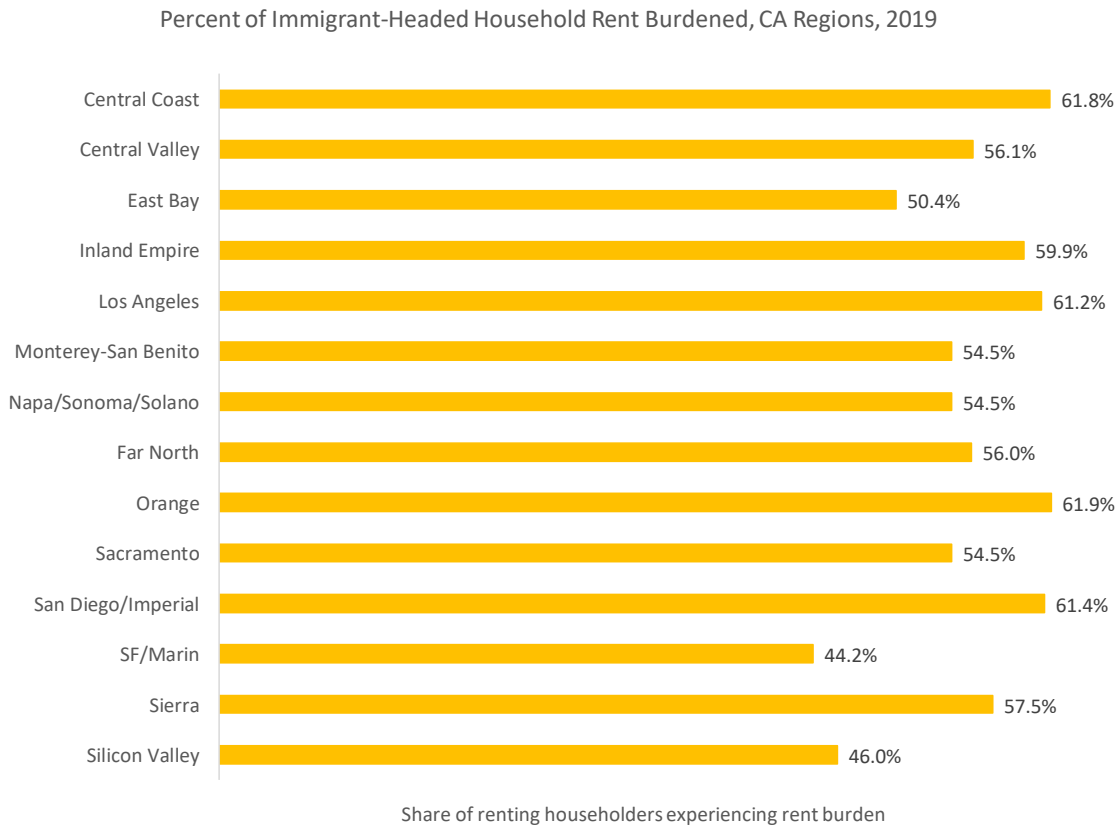


Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes renter-occupied households with cash rent (excludes group quarters). Rent burden is defined as spending more than 30 percent of income on rent and utilities and severely rent burden as spending more than 50 percent. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

Rent burden differs across the state. As shown in Figure 43, immigrant-headed households who experience the highest rate of rent burden live in Orange County (61.9 percent), the Central Coast (61.8 percent), the San Diego and Imperial region (61.4 percent), and Los Angeles County (61.2 percent). In contrast, the areas where immigrant-headed households are experiencing the lowest rate of rent burden are the San Francisco and Marin region (44.2 percent) and the Silicon Valley 46.0 percent). Though these places are well-known for exorbitant real estate and higher cost of living, immigrants who also live in these regions have higher wage earnings and household incomes. This may be expected with the technology and business sectors in these regions that attract highly-educated immigrants with sought after skills, including H1-B visa holders.



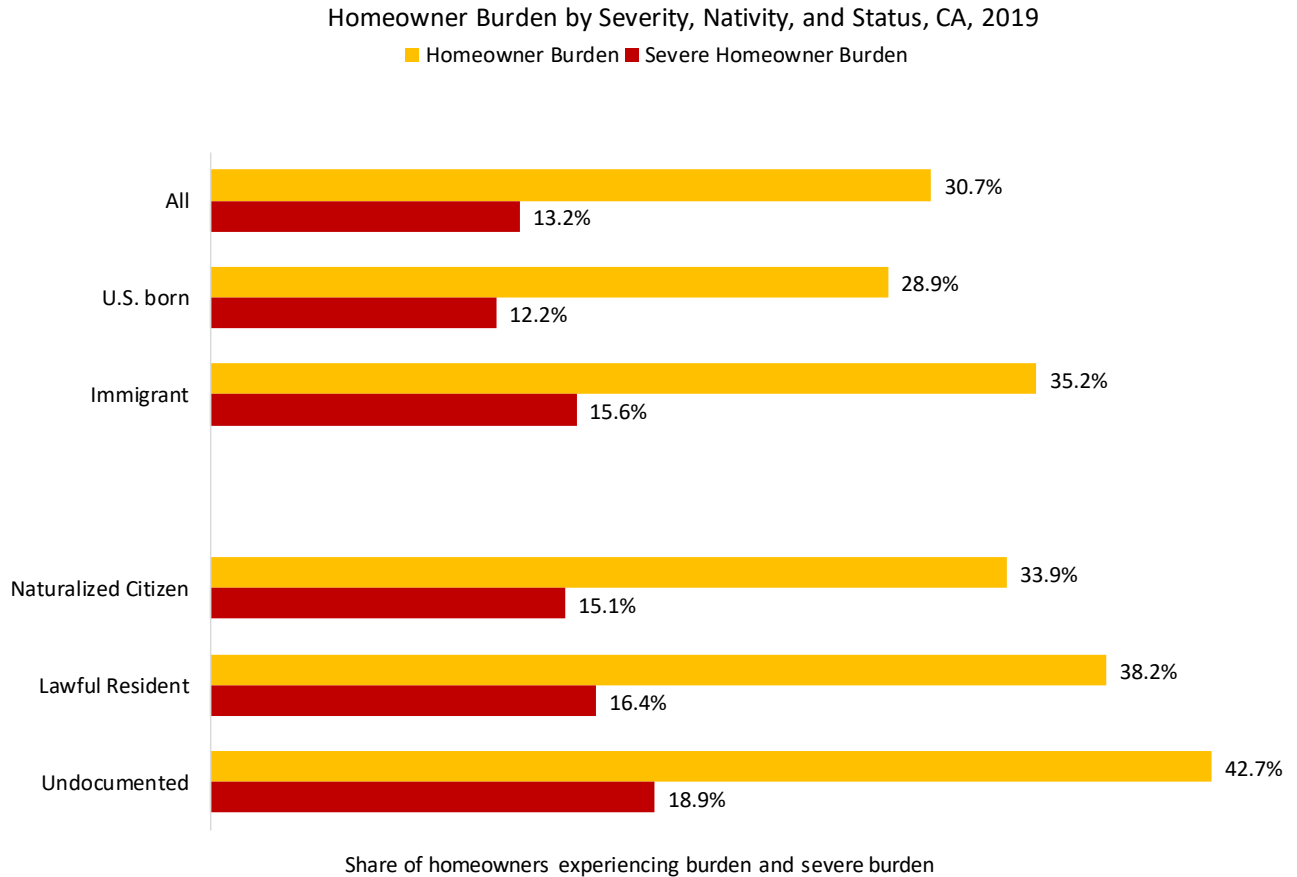
**Figure 43: Percent of Immigrant-Headed Household Rent Burdened, CA Regions, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes renter-occupied households with cash rent (excludes group quarters). Rent burden is defined as spending more than 30 percent of income on rent and utilities. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

While more immigrants are homeowners, it is more of a financial strain for them. Nearly half of immigrant-headed households own their home, a rate lower than households headed by U.S.-born homeowners (57.4 percent), but they are more likely to experience housing burden (i.e., paying at least 30 percent of income towards mortgage) and severe housing burden (i.e., paying at least 50 percent of income towards mortgage). Figure 44 shows that in California, 35.2 percent of immigrant homeowners are housing burdened compared to 28.9 percent of U.S.-born homeowners. More than 15 percent of immigrant-headed households are severely rent burdened compared to 12.2 percent of households headed by U.S.-born homeowners. Similar to the disparities seen with rent burden, households headed by undocumented immigrant homeowners are the most likely to experience housing burden (42.7 percent) and severe housing burden (18.9 percent).

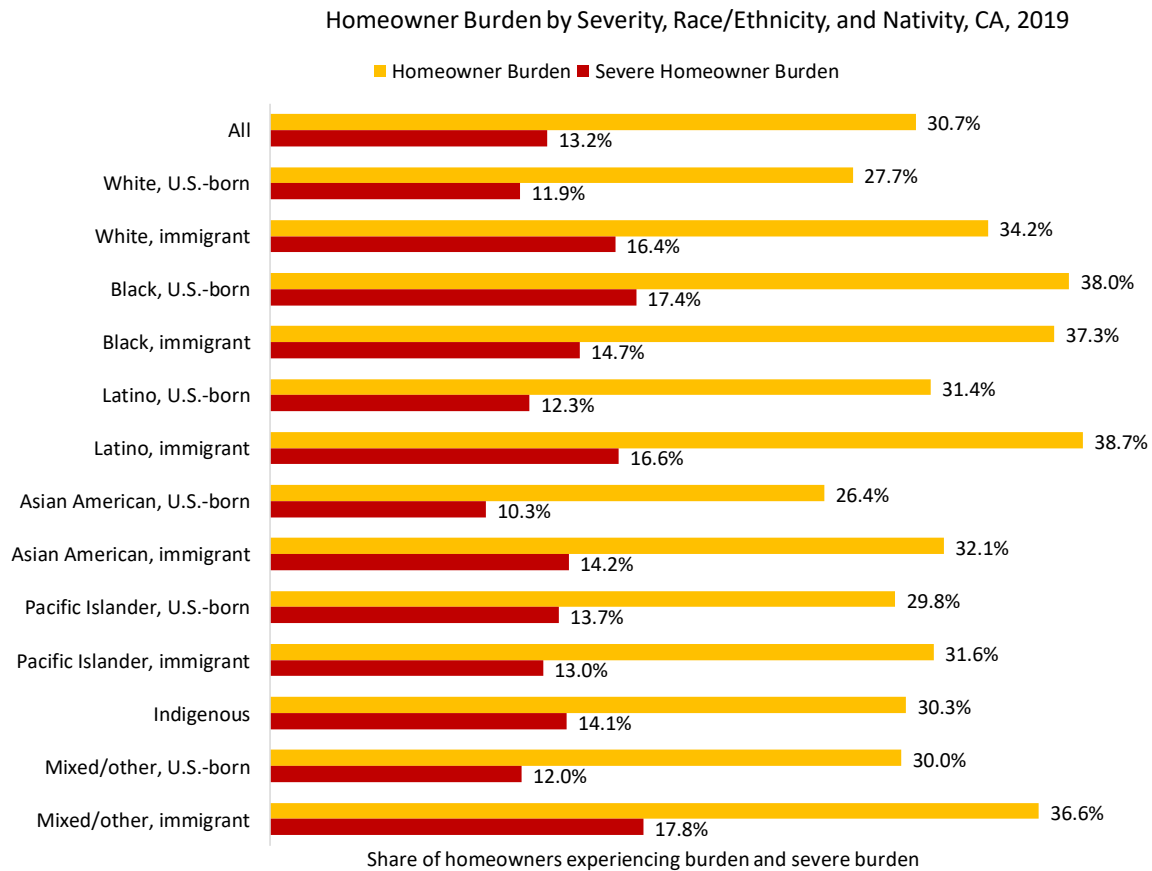
**Figure 44: Homeowner Burden by Severity, Nativity, and Status, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes owner-occupied households with selected monthly owner costs (excludes group quarters). Housing burden is defined as spending more than 30 percent of income on mortgage and utilities and severely housing burden as spending more than 50 percent. See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and lawful resident population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

Generally, economic strain is less on homeowners than renters, as seen when comparing Figure 41 and Figure 44, but that stress remains racialized. In California, 30.7 percent of homeowners are housing burdened and more than 13 percent of homeowners in the state are severely housing burdened. These rates are primarily driven by households headed by immigrants and homeowners of color. Households headed by Latino immigrants (38.7 percent), U.S.-born Black homeowners (38.0 percent), and Black immigrants (37.3 percent) are experiencing the highest rate of housing burden. When looking at severe housing burden, households headed by Other/mixed-race immigrants (17.8 percent), U.S.-born Black homeowners (17.4 percent), Latino immigrants (16.6 percent), and white immigrants (16.4 percent) have the highest rates.

**Figure 45: Homeowner Burden by Severity, Race/Ethnicity, and Nativity, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes owner-occupied households with selected monthly owner costs (excludes group quarters). Housing burden is defined as spending more than 30 percent of income on mortgage and utilities and severely housing burden as spending more than 50 percent. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

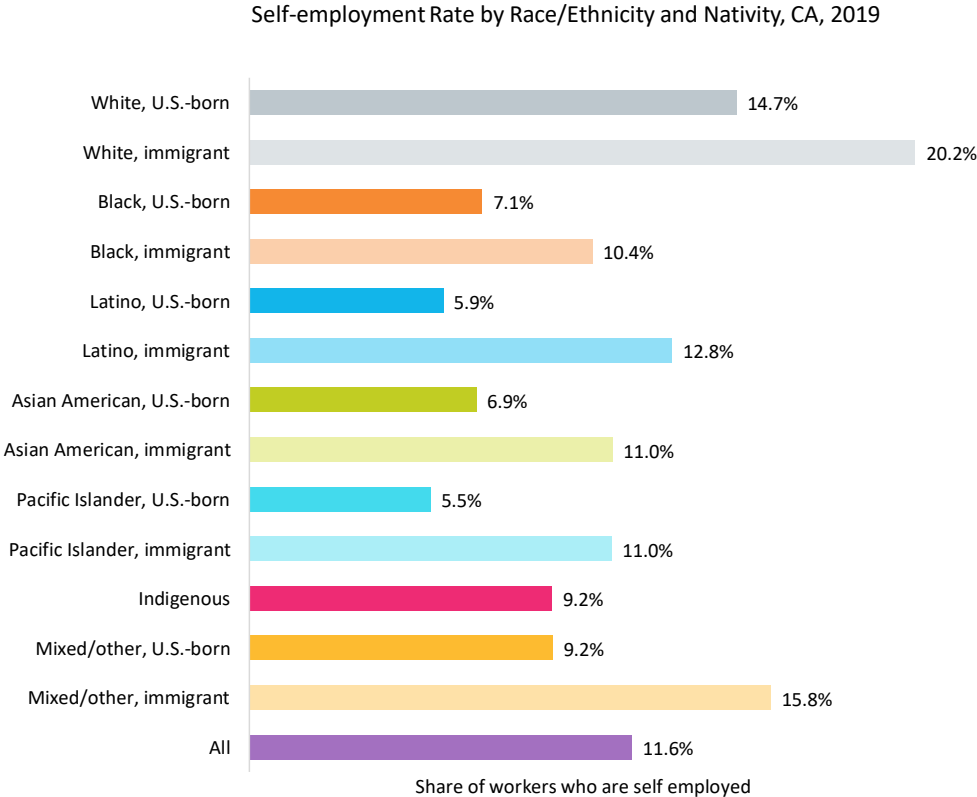
Homeownership can be an important strategy in building intergenerational wealth and is often used as a measure of immigrant integration (Pastor, Ortiz, and Lopez 2018). However, as immigrant homeowners and homeowners of color are more likely to be housing burdened, they are also more susceptible to losing this asset. The 2008 Great Recession and the economic consequences of the pandemic showcase the fragility of our economy: job instability led to loss of income and missed mortgage payments, which puts people at risk of foreclosure and of becoming unhoused. Low-income immigrants living in high-cost areas may move to more affordable regions despite more hostility towards immigrants (Bay Area News Group 2021; García 2014; Jory Rand and Manthey 2021). For example, the cost of living in the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles may push lower-income immigrants to more affordable areas, such as the Central Valley and or the Inland Empire, despite more anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy.

Immigrants are a vital part of the economy because of their spending power as well as labor and tax base contributions, even undocumented immigrants with Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers

(ITINs). In 2018, with a spending power of \$275 billion, immigrants in California are a significant driving force of the economy and important financial base for expanding public services through their \$36.3 billion contribution to state and local taxes and \$80.4 billion contribution to federal taxes, according to the California Immigrant Data Portal. Despite high rates of economic insecurity, especially during the pandemic, immigrants in California contributed heavily to local, state, and federal taxes—helping to expand public benefits and services for all Californians.

Immigrants are not only an asset in keeping the economy and many industries running, they are also important entrepreneurs and small business owners that are providing local communities with more jobs and services. Figure 46 shows one measure of entrepreneurship: the rate of self-employment. In California, 13.1 percent of immigrant workers are self-employed, a higher rate than the 10.8 percent of U.S.-born workers. Across race/ethnicity, immigrant workers are consistently more likely to be self-employed than their U.S.-born counterparts. Latino immigrant workers (12.8 percent) are nearly 7 percentage points more likely to be self-employed than U.S.-born Latino workers (5.9 percent). White immigrant workers (20.2 percent) have the highest rate of self-employment—nearly twice the rate of the state’s overall rate.

**Figure 46: Self-employment Rate by Race/Ethnicity and Nativity, CA, 2019**



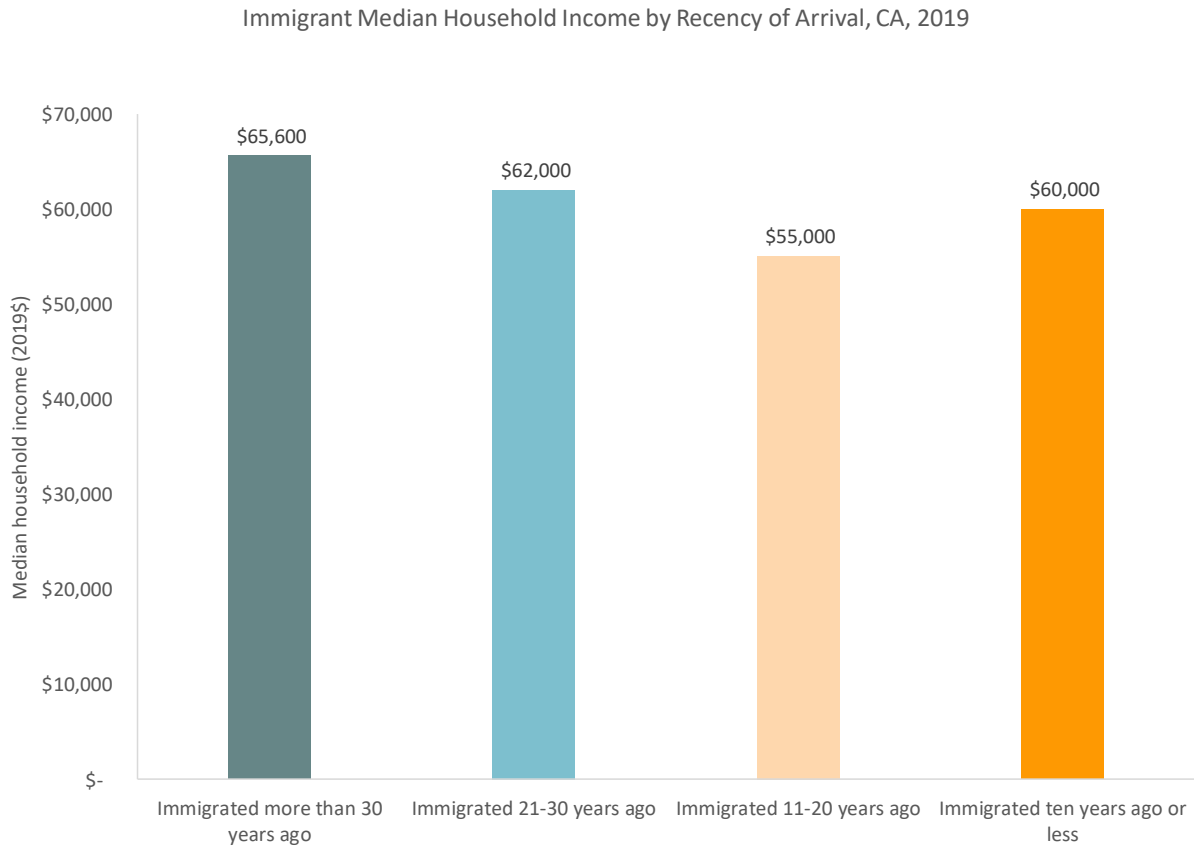
Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes the employed civilian population age 16 or older. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

Self-employment for immigrants into certain sectors is also racialized. Asian immigrants are often self-employed in running their own restaurants and import-export firms, and for some white immigrants, real estate is their niche (Gold, Light, and Johnston 2006). Latino immigrants in California are more likely than other groups to be self-employed as street vendors, domestic workers, and day laborers (Molina 2018; Valenzuela Jr. 2002). As discussed previously, this group has the largest number of undocumented immigrants and are most likely to face barriers to employment as it relates to immigration status. They often turn to self-employment, like street vending, but then those occupations have become stigmatized and targeted by immigration enforcement (Amuedo-Dorantes, Lofstrom, and Wang 2020). However, while self-employment can be the result of exclusion, many immigrants may also see it as part of their American Dream.

Immigrant entrepreneurs and small business owners face challenges during the pandemic to keep their stores, restaurants, and companies open amidst job layoffs, decreased consumer spending, and city-wide shutdowns. They may face greater barriers in accessing federal and local relief funds for small businesses, whether procedural barriers faced by immigrant entrepreneurs with limited English proficiency, for example, or hesitance to reach out for support because of local and federal anti-immigrant policies (e.g., public charge rules). This is especially consequential for the 12.1 percent of undocumented immigrant workers who are self-employed, a rate higher than U.S.-born workers.

Moving on, we can compare immigrant cohorts by recency of arrival to understand immigrants' economic trajectories. Figure 47 shows that with the exception of those who immigrated within the last decade, immigrants' income increases as the length of their time in the country increases. The median household income for immigrants who arrived more than 30 years ago is \$65,600—higher than those who immigrated 21 to 30 years ago (\$62,000), 11 to 20 years ago (\$55,000), and within the last decade (\$60,000).

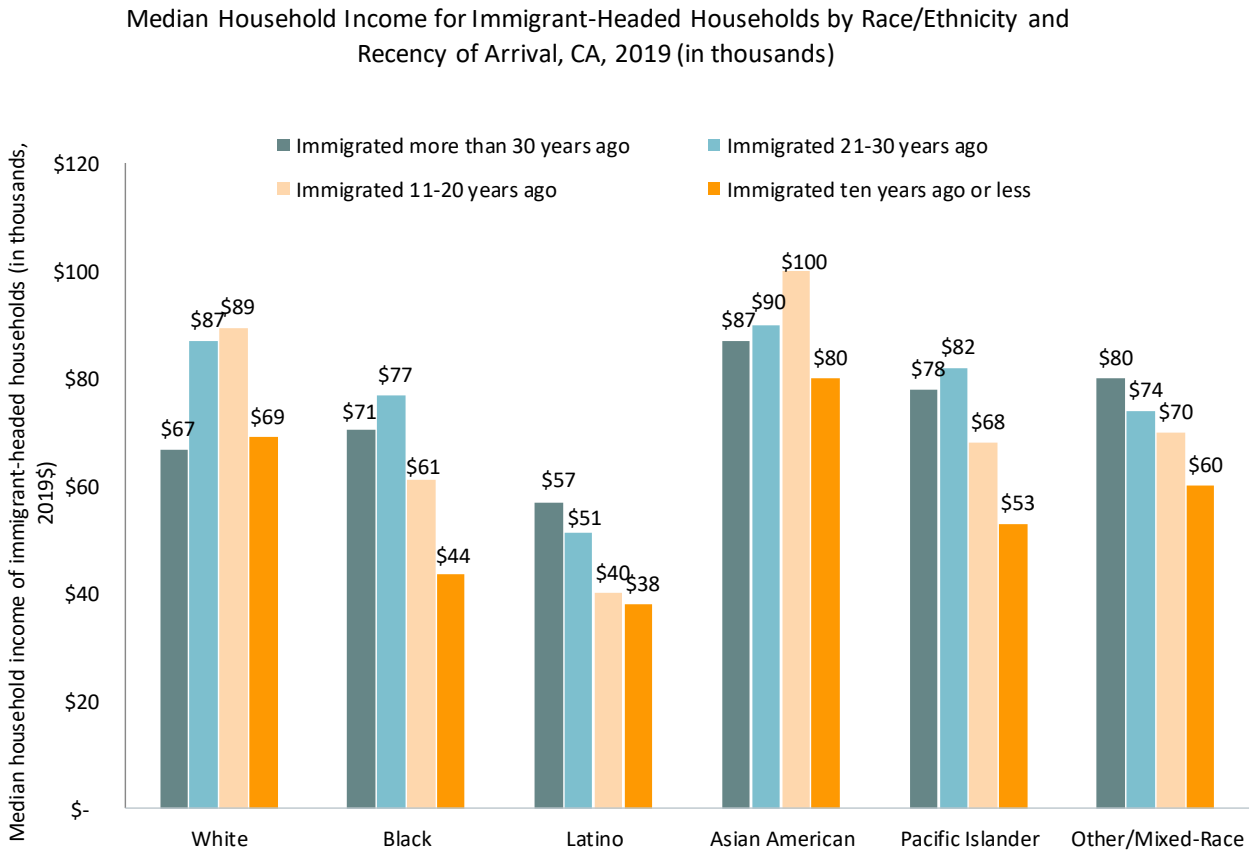
**Figure 47: Immigrant Median Household Income by Recency of Arrival, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes all households (no group quarters). Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average. Values are in 2019 dollars.

Why are recent immigrants breaking this trend? The breakdown by race/ethnicity in Figure 48 helps to explain this trend as white (\$69,000) and Asian American (\$80,000) immigrants who arrived in the last decade have a significantly higher median income than their Black (\$43,500), Latino (\$38,000), and Pacific Islander (\$53,000) counterparts. The case of Asian American immigrants is particularly interesting as the cohort with the highest median income are those who immigrated 11 to 20 years ago (\$100,000). Along with Asian American immigrants' high median income among those who arrived in the last decade, this is not surprising considering the influx of highly-educated workers with highly-valued skills from Asia who arrived in the 2000's and onwards, benefitting from policies like the 2004 H1-B Visa reform. As for Latino immigrants who arrived within the last decade, we suspect their lower median household income is shaped by their limited employment opportunities and low-paying wages—especially among undocumented Latino immigrants who face several social, economic, and legal barriers to their integration.

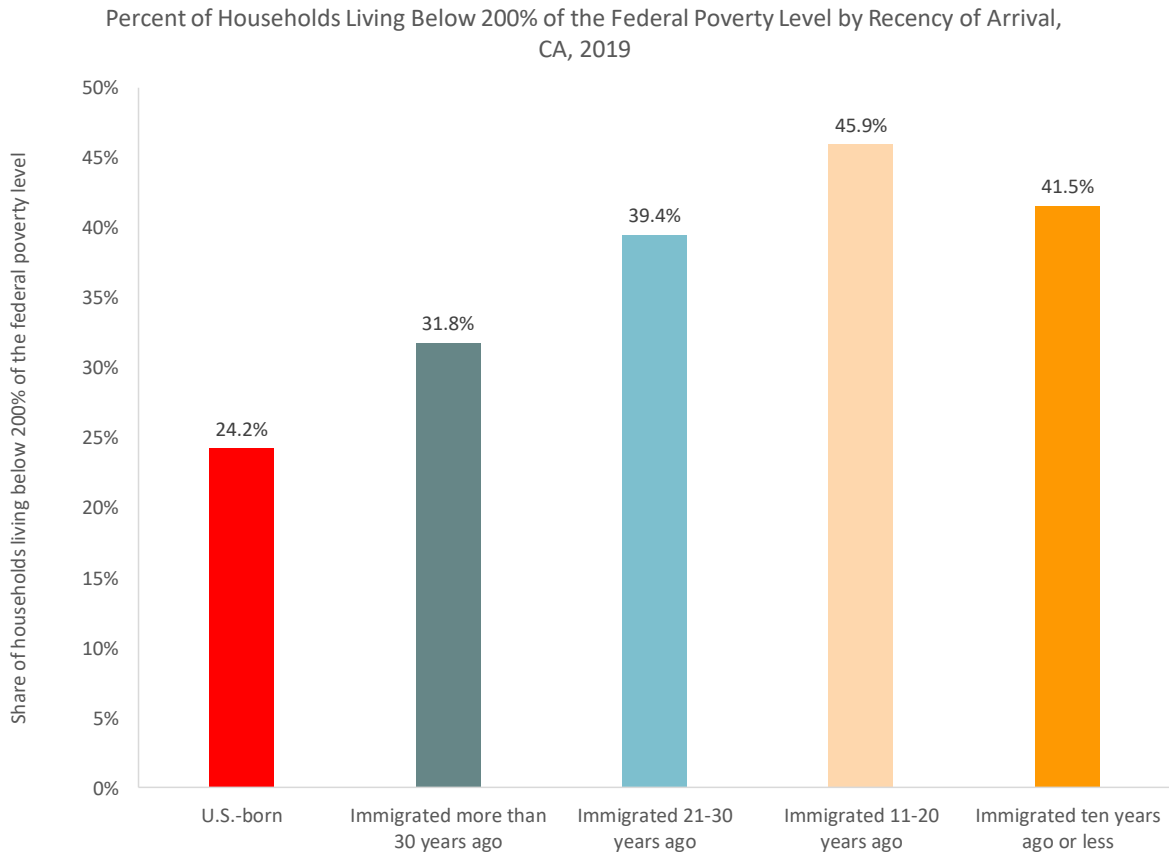
**Figure 48: Median Household Income for Immigrant-Headed Households by Race/Ethnicity and Recency of Arrival, CA, 2019 (in thousands)**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes all households (no group quarters). See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and lawful resident population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average. Values are in 2019 dollars.

Additionally, households headed by longer-settled immigrants are less likely to be living in poverty (see Figure 49). Over 38 percent of California’s immigrant-headed households live below 200 percent of the federal poverty level compared to 24.2 percent of U.S.-born-headed households. Disaggregated by recency of arrival, we see that immigrants who arrived more than 30 years ago exhibit the lowest rate of poverty (31.8 percent) among immigrant-headed households. This is a lower rate than households headed by immigrants who arrived 21 to 30 years ago (39.4 percent), 11 to 20 years ago (45.9 percent), and within the last decade (41.5 percent). In aggregate, households headed by immigrants who arrived in the recent decade are less likely to live in poverty than the households headed by immigrants who arrived 11 to 20 years earlier.

**Figure 49: Percent of Households Living Below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level by Recency of Arrival, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes all households (no group quarters). Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

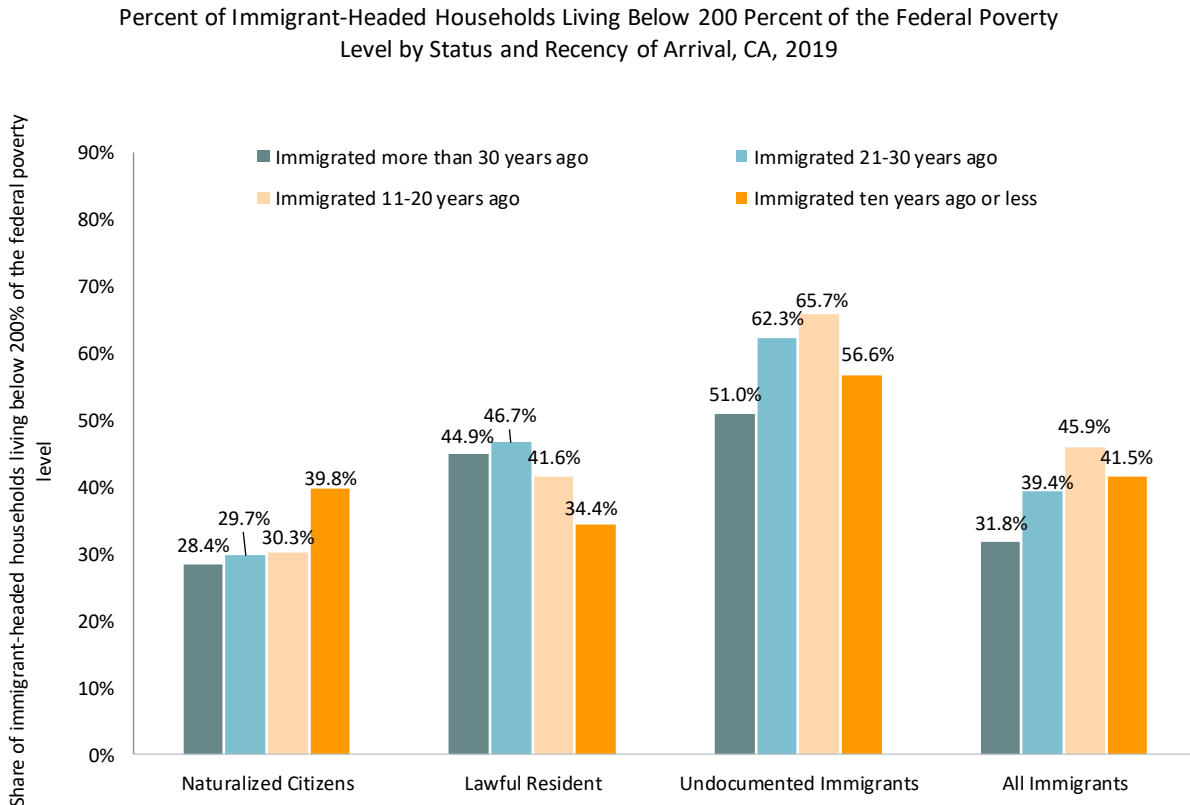
To further understand this interesting trend, we look at status and time in the country. In general, the more time immigrants have been in the country, the less likely they are to be living in poverty. This is what we see with the naturalized and the undocumented immigrant population—with the exception of the undocumented who arrived within the last decade. As shown in Figure 50, nearly 57 percent of households headed by undocumented immigrants who arrived within the last ten years are living in poverty, a rate lower than the 65.7 percent of households headed by undocumented immigrants who arrived 11 to 20 years ago, 62.3 percent of undocumented immigrants who arrived 21 to 30 years ago, and 51.0 percent of undocumented immigrants who arrived more than 30 years ago.

The trend for lawful residents is interestingly different from immigrants broadly. Figure 50 shows that about 34.4 percent of households headed by lawful residents who arrived within the last decade live in poverty compared to 41.6 percent of lawful residents who arrived 11 to 20 years ago, 46.7 percent of lawful residents who immigrated 21 to 30 years ago, and 44.9 percent of lawful residents who arrived more than 30 years ago. This trend is likely reflective of several factors, including how lawful residents



with more resources are naturalizing the longer they are in the U.S., thus leading to a higher rate of longer-settled lawful residents who are experiencing poverty; and how naturalization provides greater economic opportunities and resources over time to lift immigrants out of poverty (Pastor and Scoggins 2012). In addition, lawful residents also include H1-B visa holders who, regardless of their short time in the country, have higher household income associated with their high-earning and high-skilled jobs.

**Figure 50: Percent of Immigrant-Headed Households Living Below 200 Percent of the Federal Poverty Level by Status and Recency of Arrival, CA, 2019**

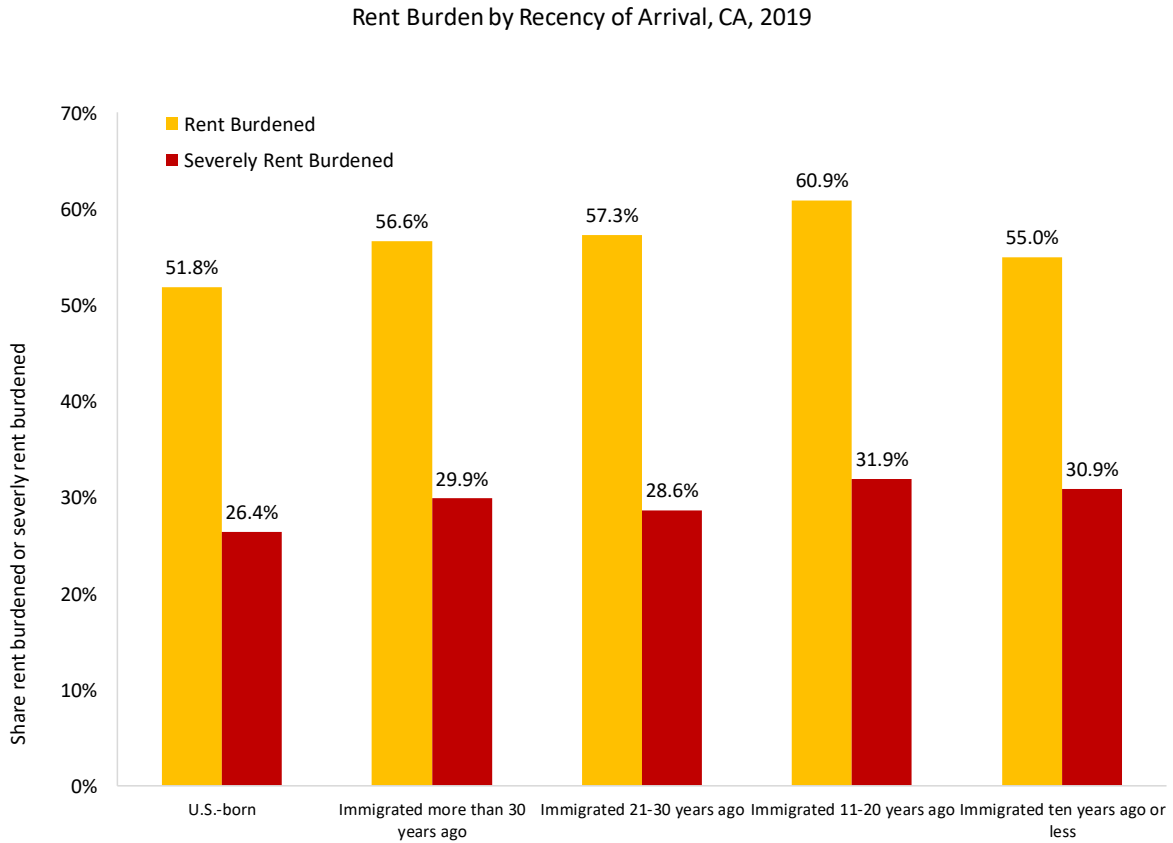


Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes all households (no group quarters). See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and lawful resident population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average. Values are in 2019 dollars.

Figure 51 shows a similar trend on how recency of arrival may be associated with rent and housing burden. With the exception of households headed by immigrants who arrived within the last decade, longer-settled immigrants are experiencing rent burden at slightly lower rates. The data shows that 60.9 percent of households headed by immigrants who arrived 11 to 20 years ago are rent burdened compared to 57.3 percent of households headed by immigrants who arrived 21 to 30 years ago and 56.6 percent of those who arrived more than 30 years ago. About 55 percent of households headed by

immigrants who arrived within the last decade are rent burdened, which is the lowest among immigrant cohorts but still higher than households headed by U.S.-born residents (51.8 percent).

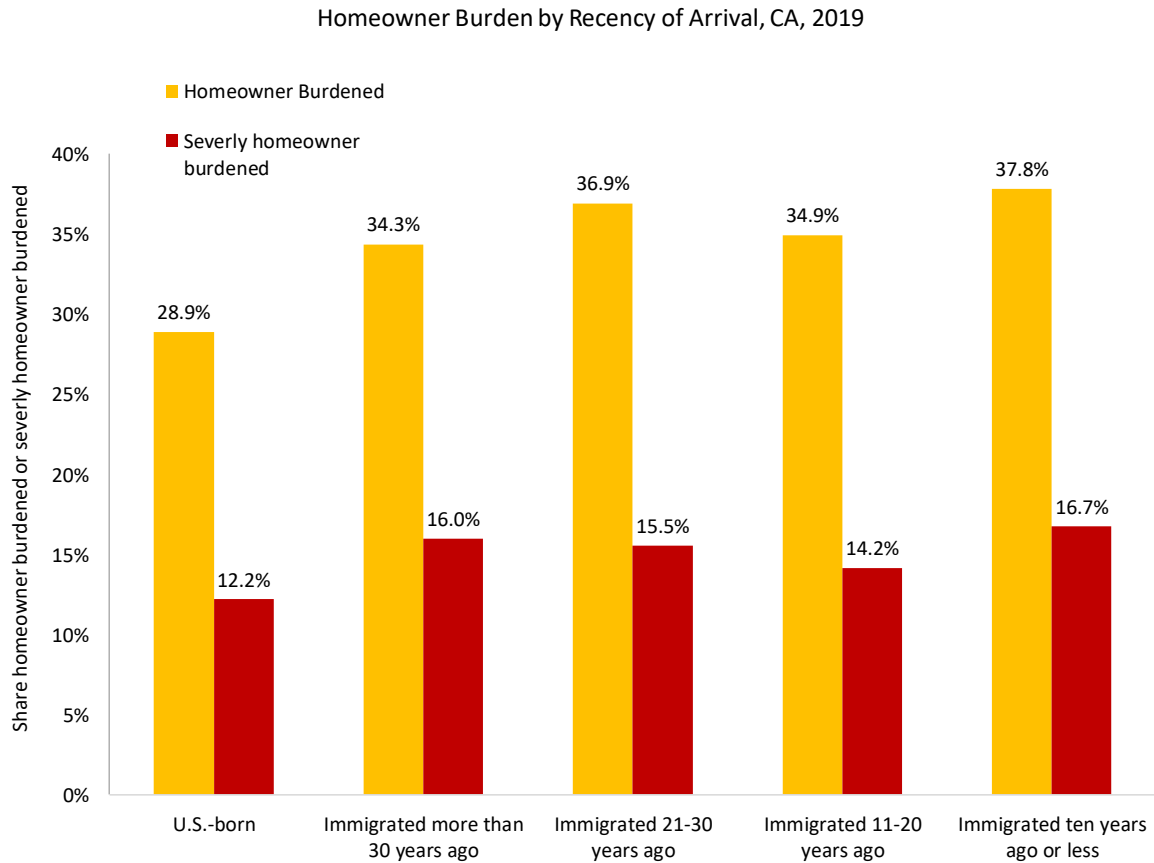
**Figure 51: Rent Burden by Recency of Arrival, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes renter-occupied households with cash rent (excludes group quarters). Rent burden is defined as spending more than 30 percent of income on rent and utilities. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

Among homeowners, as shown in Figure 52, the trend is different as households headed by immigrants who arrived within the last decade are experiencing the highest rate of housing burden (37.8 percent). In comparison, 34.9 percent of households headed by immigrants who arrived 11 to 20 years ago are housing burdened, a rate lower than the cohort who arrived 21 to 30 years ago (36.9 percent). Among immigrant-headed households, those who immigrated more than 30 years ago experience the lowest rate of housing burden at 34.3 percent. Overall, housing burden is sharper for immigrants than for households headed by U.S.-born homeowners (28.9 percent).

**Figure 52: Homeowner Burden by Recency of Arrival, CA, 2019**

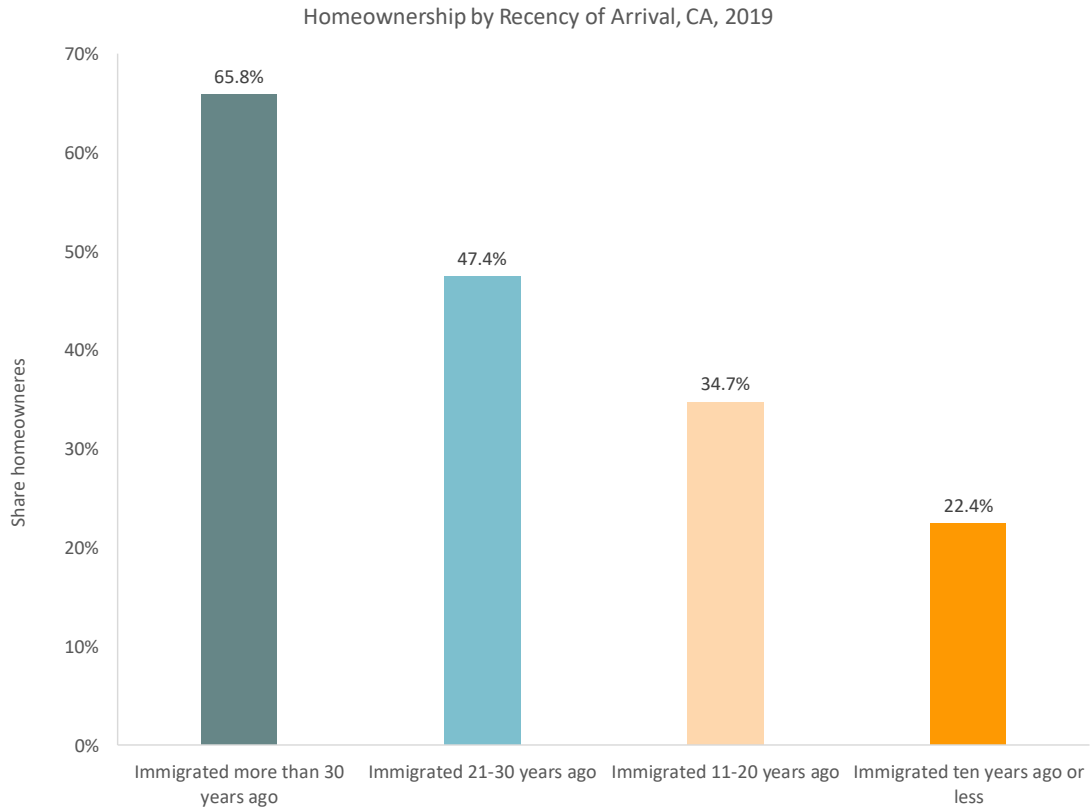


Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes owner-occupied households with selected monthly owner costs (excludes group quarters). Housing burden is defined as spending more than 30 percent of income on mortgage and utilities and severely housing burden as spending more than 50 percent. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

California’s rising housing cost has detrimental effects across immigrant cohorts despite recency of arrival. However, greater burden occurs for more recently-arrived immigrants which is not surprising considering the exponential rise in housing prices in the recent decade. This is also concerning for immigrants who have been in the country for decades, as a significant share of these longer-settled households still struggle to achieve economic mobility. Although rent and housing burden decreases slightly for longer-settled immigrants, the pandemic can exacerbate these rates.

Though immigrant-headed households (48.4 percent) overall have a lower rate of homeownership than U.S.-born-headed households (57.4 percent) in California, a disaggregation by recency of arrival shows that longer-settled immigrants have higher rates of homeownership. Figure 53 shows that nearly 66 percent of households headed by immigrants who arrived more than 30 years ago are homeowners compared to 47.4 percent of those who arrived 21 to 30 years ago, 34.7 percent of those who immigrated 11 to 20 years ago, and 22.4 percent of those who arrived within the last decade.

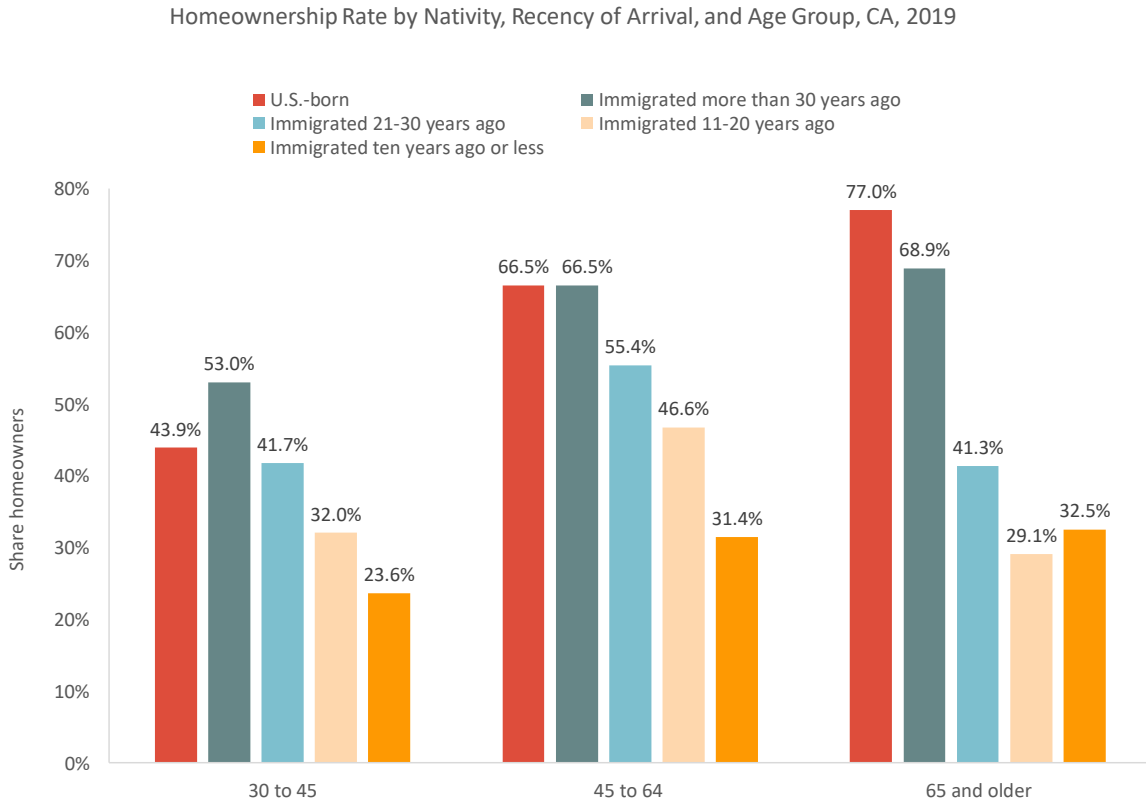
**Figure 53: Homeownership by Recency of Arrival, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes all households (no group quarters). See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and lawful resident population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

How does age factor into homeownership rates? Figure 54 shows that similar trends occur when disaggregating by age category with the exception of recently arrived seniors. Among households headed by immigrants who are 65 years and older, 32.5 percent of those who immigrated within the last decade are homeowners—a rate higher than those who immigrated 11 to 20 years ago (29.1 percent) but lower than those who immigrated 21 to 30 years ago (41.3 percent) and more than 30 years ago (68.9 percent).

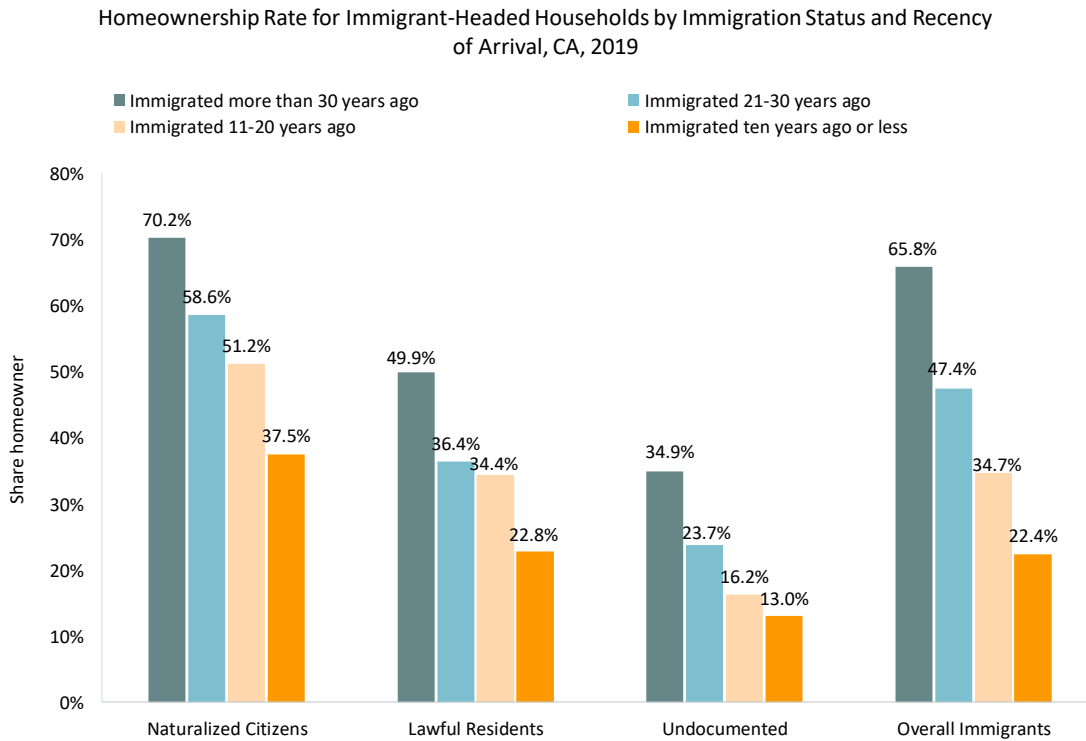
**Figure 54: Homeownership Rate by Nativity, Recency of Arrival, and Age Group, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes all households (no group quarters). Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

With rising housing costs, homeownership is becoming an unattainable dream for many immigrants. When looking at immigration status, households headed by naturalized citizens (63.0 percent) are the most likely to be homeowners, followed by lawful residents (35.3 percent), and undocumented immigrants (18.7 percent). This is not surprising considering the financial and procedural barriers, such as applying for a mortgage, some immigrants face due to their status. As shown in Figure 55, further disaggregation by recency of arrival also reveal that across immigration status, longer-settled immigrants are more likely to own a home. The most likely homeowners are households headed by a naturalized citizen who arrived more than 30 years ago (70.2 percent), whereas the least likely are households headed by undocumented immigrants who arrived within the last decade (13.0 percent).

**Figure 55: Homeownership Rate for Immigrant-Headed Household by Immigration Status and Recency of Arrival, CA, 2019**



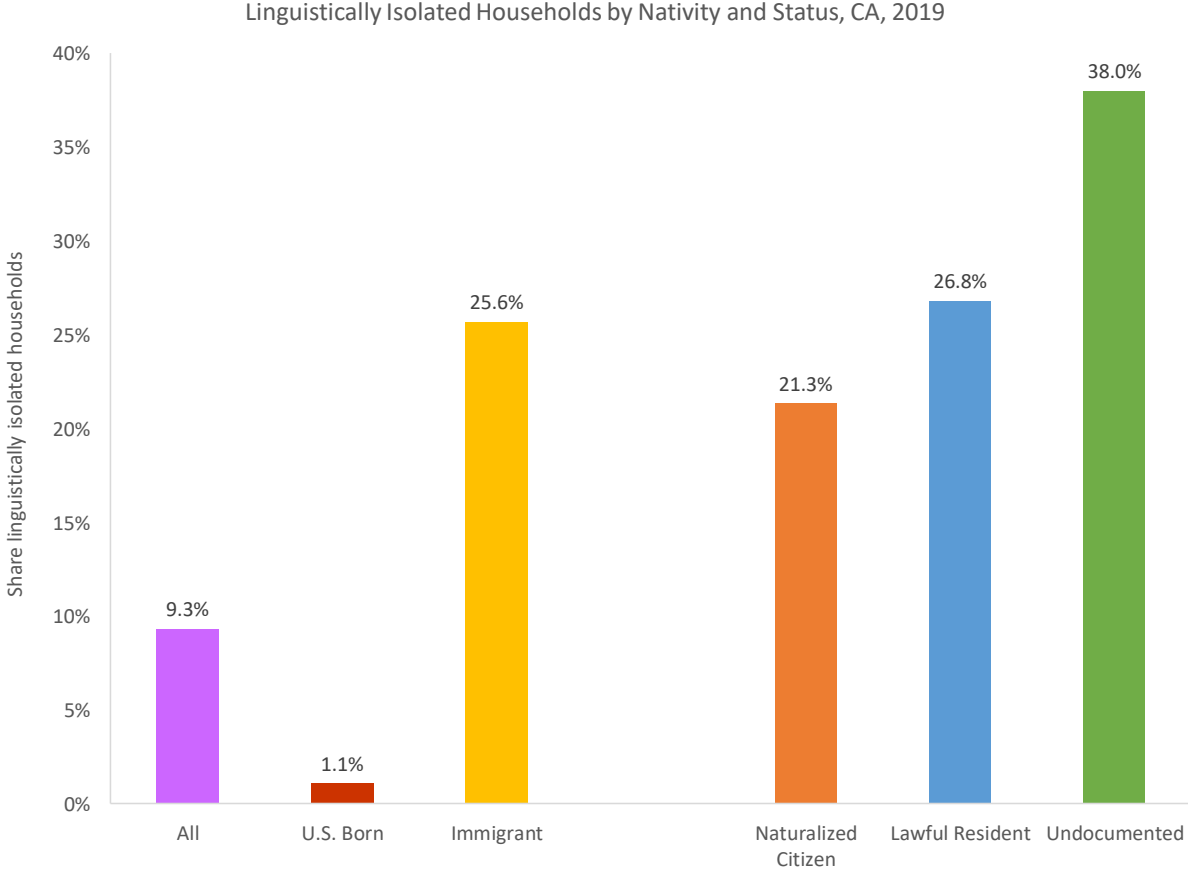
Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes owner-occupied households (excludes group quarters). See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and lawful resident population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

## CIVIC PARTICIPATION BY CALIFORNIA’S IMMIGRANTS

How immigrants engage with civic life and their surrounding community is a key facet of immigrant integration. Civic engagement is oftentimes associated with organizing and mobilizing to create social change. Though voting, protesting, volunteering, and contacting public officials are among common and important forms of civic engagement, we explore the conditions in which immigrants are able to more actively engage their community civically, including ways in which immigrants are able to receive important public health and safety information and services. Immigrants, especially those without lawful status, face several barriers to formal civic engagement. However, through informal or indirect methods of civic participation, such as political canvassing and phone banking, non-citizens and undocumented immigrants have helped shape and mobilize the political landscape of California, despite their inability to vote. In this section, we focus on language skills, naturalization, and digital connectedness to explore if immigrants in California are provided the necessary conditions to be civically engaged.

Linguistically isolated households face unique challenges in their civic engagement as they experience barriers to information if provided in a language they have limited proficiency in. This is an important measure of civic engagement because language isolation impacts immigrants’ civic participation and how they connect with civic institutions. In California, as shown in Figure 56, 25.6 percent of households headed by immigrants are identified as linguistically isolated, where no member aged 14 or older speaks English at least “very well.” When disaggregated by status, households headed by undocumented immigrants are the most likely to be linguistically isolated (38.0 percent), followed by households headed by lawful residents (26.8 percent) and naturalized citizens (21.3 percent).

**Figure 56: Linguistically Isolated Households by Nativity and Status, CA, 2019**



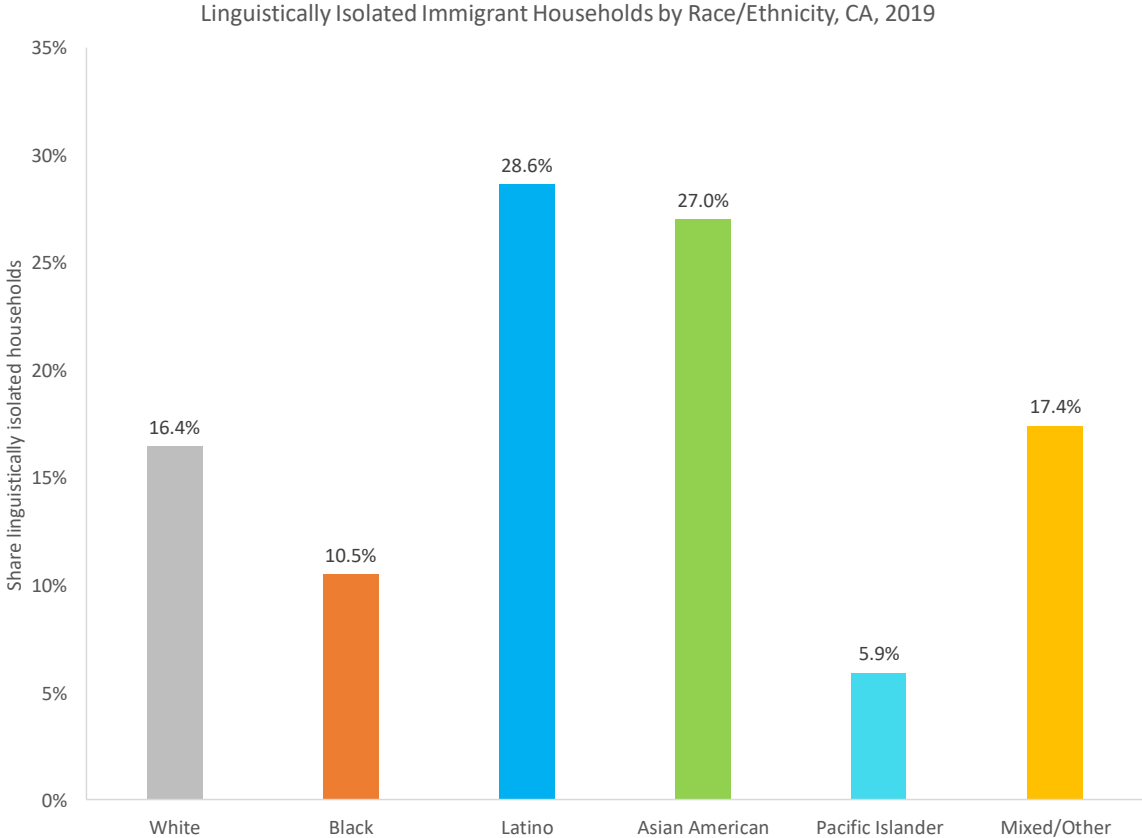
Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: Universe includes all households. A household is considered to be linguistically isolated when no member age 14 years or older speaks only English or speaks English at least “very well.” See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented and LPR population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

Research shows that language accessibility is linked to civic engagement and potentially hinders immigrant participation if not adequately provided, including language-appropriate information (Asian Americans Advancing Justice 2013; Kim 2017). Beyond formal processes and systems to improve language accessibility, California can also invest in additional efforts that promote English learning and

multilingual outreach and services for immigrants with limited English proficiency. In providing pertinent information to immigrant communities (e.g., voter information, COVID-19 related guidelines, public benefits and services), strategies and resources to address language barriers should be prioritized if the goal is to improve civic engagement among immigrants. This is especially important for the hard-to-reach undocumented immigrant community who face additional challenges from how the U.S. treats immigrants without lawful status.

When disaggregated by race/ethnicity, as shown in Figure 57, the data shows that households headed by Latino and Asian American immigrants are the most likely to be linguistically isolated. Nearly 29 percent of households headed by Latino immigrants are linguistically isolated compared to 27 percent of Asian American immigrant households, 17.4 percent of Other/mixed-race households, 16.4 percent of white immigrant households, 10.5 percent of Black immigrant households, and 5.9 percent of Pacific Islander immigrant households.

**Figure 57: Linguistically Isolated Immigrant Households by Race/Ethnicity, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes all households. A household is considered to be linguistically isolated when no member age 14 years or older speaks only English or speaks English at least “very well.” Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

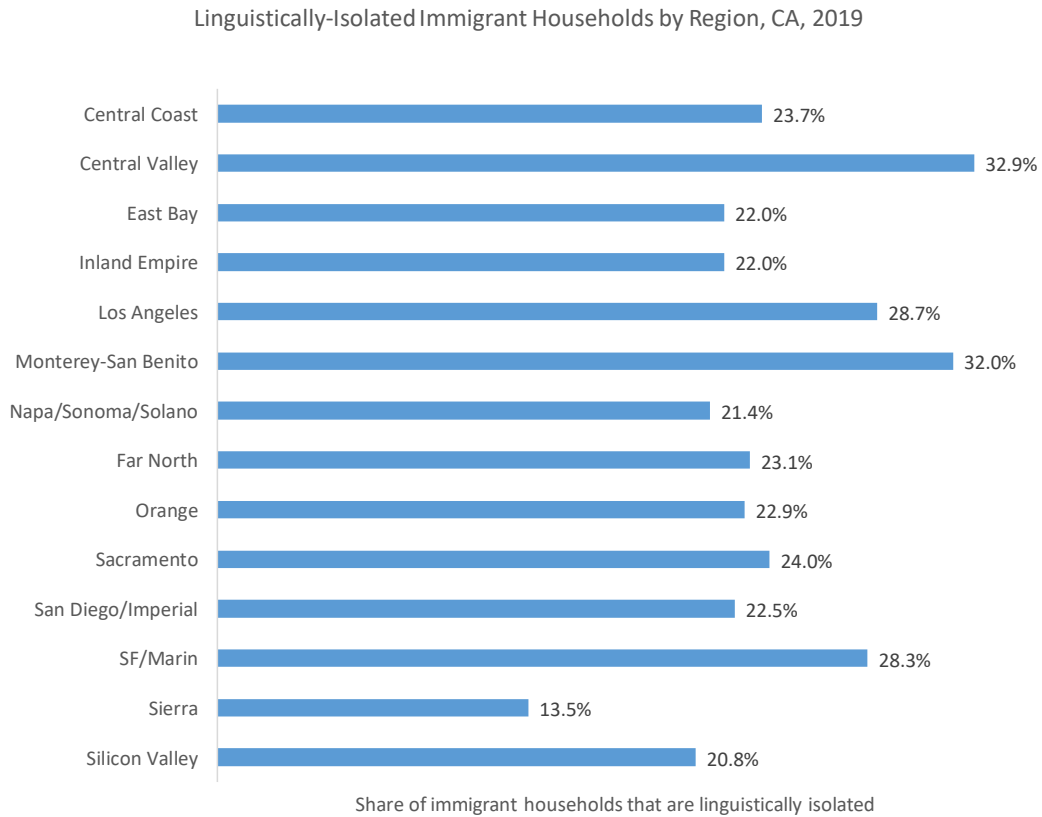


It is important to note that among white immigrant households who are linguistically isolated, the vast majority are from Iran (22.9 percent), Armenia (11.2 percent), Ukraine (7.9 percent), Russia (7.9 percent), Iraq (4.3 percent), and Syria (3.1 percent). In California, 13.1 percent of immigrants self-identify as white. Among white immigrants in California, 37.4 percent are from a Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) country. The most represented white immigrant groups come from Iran (13.5 percent), Canada (7.6 percent), and Armenia (5.1 percent). Though households headed by white immigrants from Canada yield extremely low rates of linguistic isolation (0.6 percent)—as expected because English is one of the country’s official languages—households headed by Iranian (27.2 percent) and Armenian (38.8 percent) immigrants are much more likely to be linguistically isolated compared to the average white immigrant household. This is especially true in places like Los Angeles County where nearly 90 percent of California’s Armenian immigrant population reside, with 39.9 percent of households headed by Armenian immigrants linguistically isolated.

Local agencies and organizations that serve immigrant communities should consider the varying language barriers their immigrant communities face. Across California’s regions, as shown in Figure 58, the rate of immigrant households that are linguistically isolated varies. Nearly 33 percent of households headed by immigrants in the Central Valley are linguistically isolated compared to 32 percent of immigrant households in Monterey-San Benito, 28.7 percent of immigrant households in Los Angeles County, and 28.3 percent of immigrant households in the San Francisco and Marin County region. It is important to note the regional breakdowns of the linguistically isolated immigrant population due to the different regional factors that may contribute to variation.

For example, although a politically conservative region, California’s Central Valley boasts large populations of immigrants from Mexico, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. The region is known for its agricultural industry, which is largely composed of immigrant workers due to the industry’s constant demand for cheap labor (Huang and London 2012). As mentioned throughout this report, immigrants, especially those without legal status, are limited in regards to the types of employment available to them. Therefore, regions with abundant employment opportunities, such as the Central Valley’s agricultural industry, may be appealing for immigrants looking for guaranteed work. Since these agricultural jobs mainly consist of manual labor tasks, they are also appealing to immigrants who may lack fluency in English and therefore prefer jobs without a heavy need for communication (Nawyn et al. 2012). However, this also leaves them more vulnerable to exploitation as they are unable to seek legal services due to language barriers.

**Figure 58: Linguistically-Isolated Immigrant Households by Region, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes all households. A household is considered to be linguistically isolated when no member age 14 years or older speaks only English or speaks English at least “very well.” Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

A deeper dive into each of these regions’ linguistically-isolated households reveal somewhat similar trends (see Figure 59). Latino immigrant households are the most likely in the Central Valley (36.6 percent) and Monterey-San Benito area (36.7 percent) to be linguistically isolated. Though Latino immigrant households in Los Angeles County (29.1 percent) and the San Francisco and Marin County region (28.6 percent) have relatively high rates of being linguistically isolated, Asian American immigrant households (33.1 percent and 36.8 percent, respectively) are the most likely in both regions to have limited English proficiency. Among Asian American immigrant households in Los Angeles County, households headed by Chinese immigrants (51.9 percent), Mongolian immigrants (57.9 percent), and Korean immigrants (48.7 percent) are among the most likely to be linguistically isolated. In the San Francisco and Marin County region, households headed by Vietnamese immigrants (63.9 percent) are the most linguistically isolated Asian American immigrant group. Linguistic isolation can contribute to delayed and inaccurate communication, leading to real consequences for the health, safety, and integration of immigrant communities. To effectively facilitate civic engagement and immigrant

integration, it is important for institutions and agencies to provide language accessible information and services.

**Figure 59: Percent of Immigrant-Headed Households who are Linguistically Isolated by Region and Race/Ethnicity, CA, 2019**

	White	Black	Latino	Asian American	Pacific Islander	Other/Mixed-Race
Central Coast	8.1%	1.2%	29.6%	17.9%	13.8%	10.6%
Central Valley	22.7%	19.9%	36.6%	24.3%	2.1%	20.6%
East Bay	11.2%	16.6%	28.0%	22.5%	4.7%	18.0%
Inland Empire	9.0%	5.9%	24.0%	24.3%	4.3%	13.5%
Los Angeles County	23.9%	5.9%	29.1%	33.1%	8.3%	18.5%
Monterey-San Benito	11.7%	0.0%	36.7%	20.4%	13.7%	32.0%
Napa/Sonoma/Solano	5.7%	12.0%	28.2%	19.7%	3.7%	10.9%
Far North	6.4%	0.0%	30.6%	21.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Orange County	9.7%	12.5%	23.1%	28.1%	0.0%	21.5%
Sacramento	19.4%	6.7%	27.2%	25.9%	8.4%	23.9%
San Diego/Imperial	16.0%	23.2%	26.0%	20.7%	11.8%	15.4%
San Francisco/Marin	12.2%	7.4%	28.6%	36.8%	4.8%	28.3%
Sierra	4.6%	0.0%	18.2%	33.7%	0.0%	13.5%
Silicon Valley	10.3%	10.7%	25.8%	22.5%	4.4%	11.7%

Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes all households. A household is considered to be linguistically isolated when no member age 14 years or older speaks only English or speaks English at least “very well.” Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

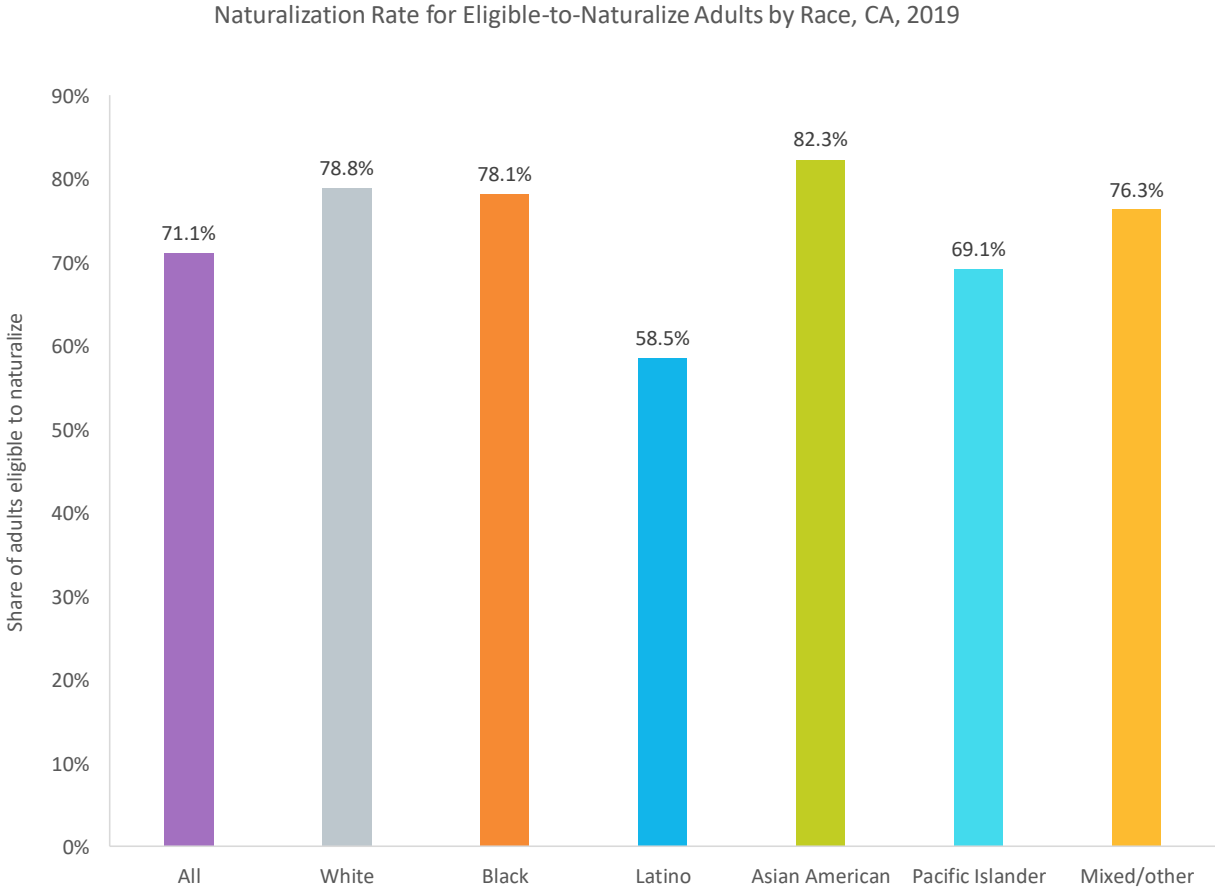
For noncitizens and immigrants without lawful status, language accessibility matters for several reasons, including when navigating the complex U.S. immigration system. Language barriers can jeopardize immigrants’ cases and ultimately their ability to remain in the country. A regional factor to consider in this context and beyond the household level is that immigrants may face additional constraints by having even fewer local immigrant support networks to turn to or formal government-provided resources, materials, and organizations tailored to meet local language needs, especially in regions like the Far North where immigrants are also a smaller share of the population compared to areas like Los Angeles and the Bay Area. For instance, during the Carr Fire in 2018, with very limited Spanish language resources or Spanish-specific infrastructure for dissemination, county officials and related agencies relied on Ernesto Carrillo, owner of Carrillo’s Mexican Store in Redding, Shasta County, to translate and post public messages in Spanish on the store’s Facebook page (Ehrlich 2019).

Another indicator of immigrant integration as well as civic engagement is naturalization. Naturalization provides immigrants many benefits and privileges, including increased wages, better employment opportunities, enhanced security, and greater opportunities for civic participation. Immigrants who

become U.S. citizens can vote for elected officials and on policies that affect them at local, state, and national levels. To determine the rate of naturalization, we divide the number of adult immigrants who have naturalized by the total number of people who are likely able to naturalize over the years (i.e., those who did naturalize and those who were eligible to naturalize but have not). Approximately 71 percent of the eligible immigrant adult population are naturalized. However, there are stark differences across race/ethnicity.

Among the eligible adult population in California, as shown in Figure 60, 58.5 percent of Latino immigrants are naturalized compared to 69.1 percent of Pacific Islander immigrants, 78.1 percent of Black immigrants, 78.8 percent of white immigrants, and 76.3 percent of Other/mixed-race immigrants. Asian American immigrants have the highest naturalization rate at 82.3 percent. It is worth noting that these racial/ethnic differences in naturalization are partially shaped by other factors, including disparities in educational attainment, English proficiency, and likelihood to experience a chilling effect from being in a mixed-status family (Le et al. 2019).

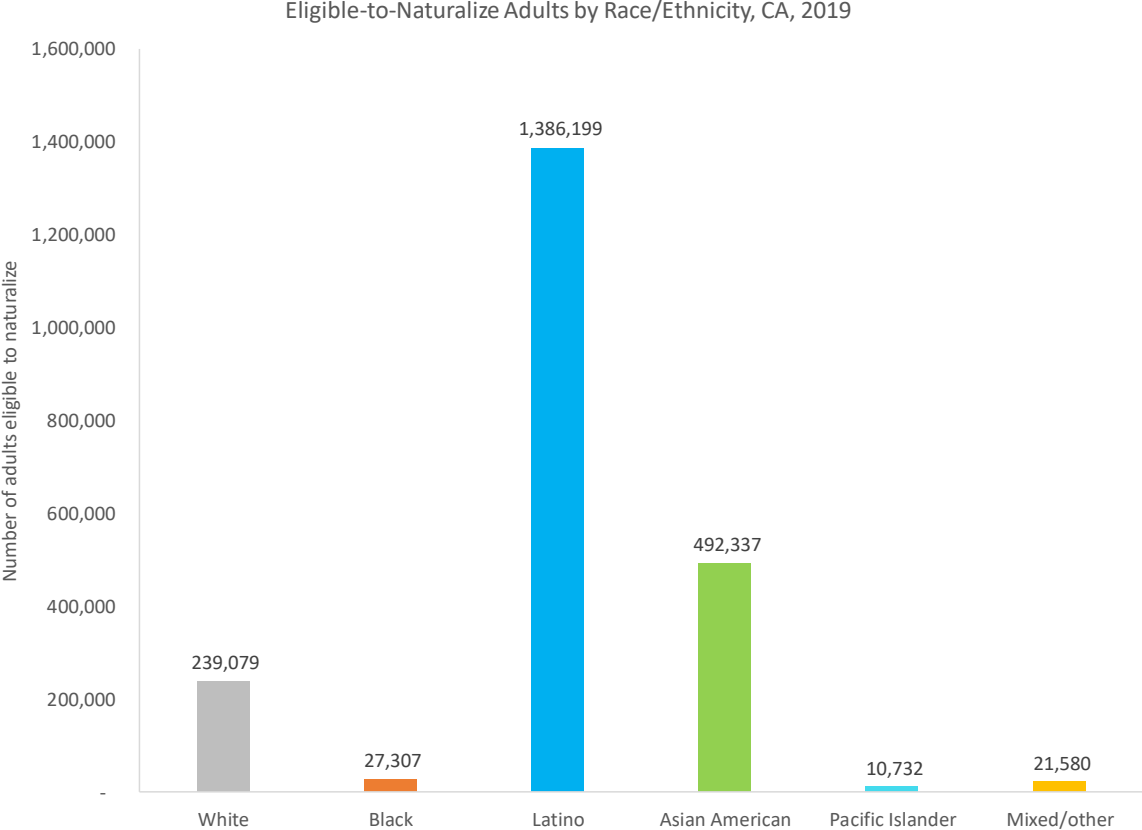
**Figure 60: Naturalization Rate for Eligible-to-Naturalize Adults by Race, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: The naturalization rate is calculated as the ratio of naturalized adults to the sum of naturalized and eligible-to-naturalize adults. Eligible-to-naturalize adults are those noncitizen adults who are estimated to be eligible to naturalize but have not yet done so.

Of the approximately 2.2 million eligible-to-naturalize immigrants in California, nearly 1.4 million are Latino—making up the vast majority at 63.7 percent (see Figure 61). This is not surprising as Latinos have the lowest rate of naturalizing. Asian American immigrants make up the next largest share at 22.6 percent, followed by white immigrants at nearly 11 percent. To equitably improve avenues for civic participation, including in the forms of voting and running for elected office, California can develop strategies that address racialized barriers in immigrants’ pathways to citizenship, including subsidizing English classes.

**Figure 61: Eligible-to-Naturalize Adults by Race/Ethnicity, CA, 2019**



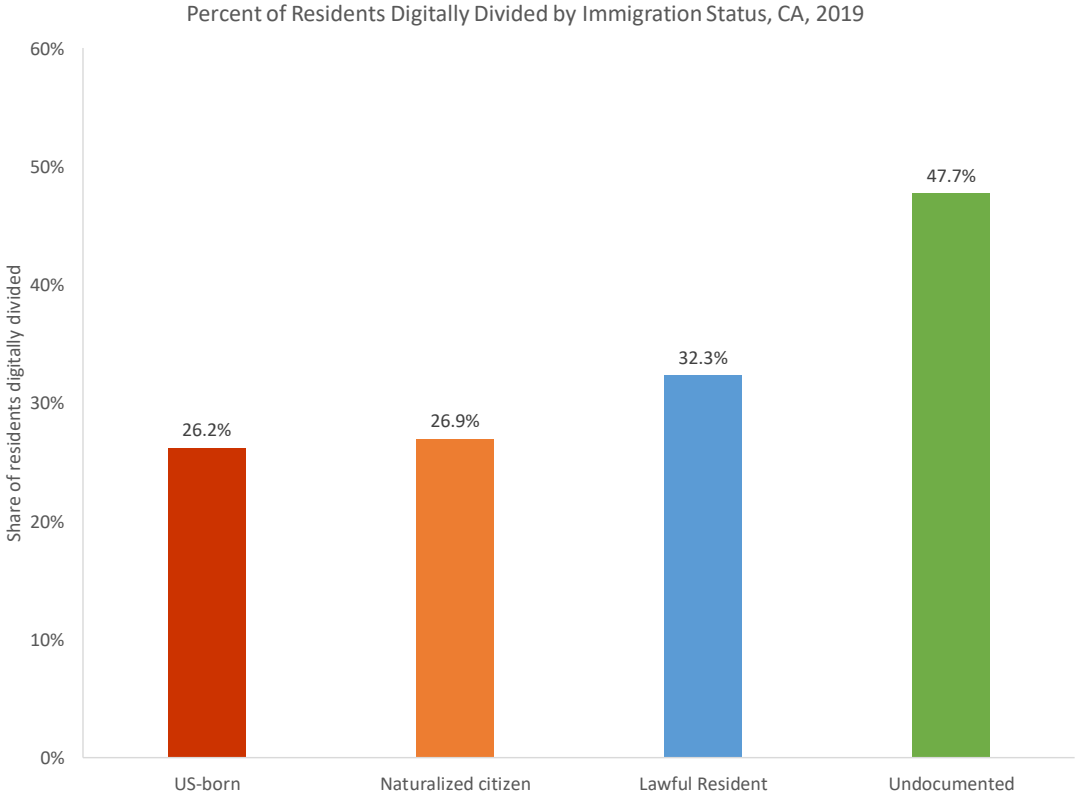
Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Eligible-to-naturalize adults are those noncitizen adults who are estimated to be eligible to naturalize but have not yet done so.

Another important element that should be considered when examining the conditions for civic participation is digital connectivity. Especially during the pandemic when public hearings and the distribution of public information rely heavily on digital platforms, access to computers and reliable internet is becoming a growing necessity for civic participation. Immigrants are more likely to be digitally disconnected than U.S.-born Californians. More specifically, 33 percent of immigrants in the state do not have access to both a computing device and reliable high-speed internet compared to 26.2 percent of

U.S.-born residents. As shown in Figure 62, the digital divide is starker when disaggregated by immigration status. Nearly 48 percent of undocumented immigrants in California are digitally disconnected. This is more than the 32.3 percent of lawful residents and 26.9 percent of naturalized citizens. In addition to challenges in being civically engaged, the implications and repercussions of this digital divide among immigrants is especially unsettling considering how vital health, employment, social services, and educational resources are primarily found and accessed online.

Similarly, on the discussion of K-12 education, the digital divide is a significant barrier for immigrant communities, especially undocumented immigrants and mixed status families. Our estimates show that 31.4 percent of K-12 students in California with at least one immigrant parent do not have access to both high speed internet and a computer, whereas 22.7 percent of non-immigrant parent households are digitally divided. Additionally, studies show that low socioeconomic (SES) schools have larger numbers of English language learners, many of whom are immigrants or the children of immigrants (Warschauer, Knobel, and Stone 2004). These low-SES schools lack adequate technology and internet access for educational instruction, showing that the digital divide also affects immigrant students.

**Figure 62: Percent of Residents Digitally Divided by Immigration Status, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: Universe includes all people in households (no group quarters). Digitally divided is defined as lacking high-speed internet or a computer at home. See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

## **WARMTH OF WELCOME IN THE GOLDEN STATE**

California has gone through tumultuous stages in how immigrants have been welcomed in the state. In this section, we discuss how the policy context in California has shaped its warmth of welcome as it relates to migration flows, immigration enforcement, and immigrant rights and benefits. Though California's past anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies have helped to shape other exclusionary legislation throughout the country (Colbern 2021). The Golden State has since built a reputation of being one of the most immigrant-friendly and progressive places in the U.S. The path to California's welcoming treatment of immigrants was not forged easily or without intense resistance.

California has long been a popular destination for immigrants around the world who saw the state as a place of economic opportunity and refuge. However, immigration to the United States has always been controlled to meet certain demands, including labor shortages and public opinion. Anti-immigrant sentiment and discriminatory rhetoric against certain groups have led to restrictions of migration flows from entire countries and regions. An early and important example of such restrictions is the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Though signed into federal law, this was primarily driven by anti-Chinese animosity and state-level exclusion policies in California during and after the Gold Rush era when immigration from China grew exponentially. Coupled with an economic recession, the growing number of Chinese migrant workers fueled nativist ideals that Chinese immigrants were stealing jobs and driving wages down with their cheap labor. This exclusion also further barred Chinese immigrants from basic rights, like owning property and becoming citizens.

With restrictions on immigration from China, California—like the rest of the U.S.—turned to their southern neighbors as a source of cheap labor. Immigration from Latin America grew, but so did the anti-immigrant sentiment towards Latino immigrants. In California, in response to the labor shortage faced during World War II, the Bracero program was established to allow foreign workers, primarily Mexican and Latin American immigrants, to live and work in the U.S. through short-term agreements. These workers engaged in agricultural and construction labor, including on railroads like the Chinese immigrants before them. By the 1960's, the Bracero program was largely opposed by labor and immigrant rights groups who blamed the government's inaction that left many Braceros vulnerable to exploitation, wage theft, and unsafe working conditions (Massey and Pren 2012). Their liminal and temporary status as seasonal workers also exemplified California's anti-immigrant attitudes at the time. Braceros, like much of immigrant labor in California's past, were treated only as cheap labor not deserving of rights (Massey and Pren 2012). Once the U.S. phased out the Bracero program, many immigrants from Latin America lost their ability to work legally within the U.S., which led to a rise in unauthorized migration from the U.S.-Mexico border. Around this time, the U.S. media began to shape an anti-immigrant narrative that centered the "Latino threat." The narrative that Latino immigrants were stealing American jobs and overwhelming the southern U.S. border was popularized after the Bracero program, and continues to this day as a major societal impediment to immigrant integration (Massey and Pren 2012).

In 1965, Congress enacted amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) to rid the U.S. immigration system of country quotas, which limited a certain number of migrants to be admitted from

each country, particularly Asian and African countries (USCIS 2019). This allowed more immigrants from across the world to enter the U.S, including an increased flow from Mexico and Central American countries. This increase in migration continued to fuel anti-immigrant sentiment in immigrant-heavy states like California to the point where the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) bolstered funding to its enforcement arm, Border Patrol.

With an influx of immigrants at the southern border, many of whom were undocumented, coupled with an economic recession in the early 1970s, anti-immigrant leaders in California seized the opportunity to pass AB 528, which was signed into state law in 1971 by then-Republican Governor Ronald Reagan. This policy restricted employers in California from hiring undocumented immigrant labor, but consequently allowed employers more agency to exploit immigrant workers without lawful status by threatening to report and deport (Colbern 2021). The trend of anti-immigrant policies continued into the 1980's and also helped to shape federal policies like the enactment of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which, among many things, criminalized undocumented immigrants and restricted migration flows into the U.S. IRCA, signed into law by President Ronald Reagan and passed with bipartisan support from Congress, is considered the first federal employer sanction law in the U.S. California's AB 528 played a significant role in shaping this component of the policy as well as subsequent policies that strengthen enforcement of undocumented immigrants, including the 2006 "Sensenbrenner Bill" (H.R. 4437), further proving California's influence in influencing immigration policy throughout the country.

The turning point for immigrant rights in California was in the 1990s after a string of anti-immigrant policies pushed by Republican and conservative leaders in the state, such as Governor Pete Wilson. The economic recession of the early 1990s led to cities filing bankruptcy and municipalities cutting public services and benefits. This fueled an anti-immigrant narrative—primarily focused on Latino immigrants—that was focused on blaming immigrants for their strains on public finances, social services, and the declining number of jobs offering livable wages. In 1993, conservative state leaders were able to push through a series of state laws that further restricted the rights of undocumented immigrants, including banning their access to driver's licenses and mandating employers to verify the immigration status of their workers (Pastor 2018). In 1994, along with Governor Wilson's reelection, California voters passed Proposition 187. Proposition 187 was formulated and pushed by anti-immigrant groups to restrict public services and benefits to undocumented immigrants, including primary and secondary education for undocumented children (Bosniak 1996). Proposition 187 also sought to deputize school administrators, public state agencies, and local law enforcement to engage in immigration enforcement through reporting suspected individuals without lawful status to federal immigration enforcement. The federal courts eventually struck down major components of this policy as unconstitutional. Due to this lingering fear, however, many undocumented immigrants in California still refrained from accessing public benefits and services due to the enforcement threats embedded in policies like Proposition 187.

Despite its short-lived restrictions on undocumented immigrants and its chilling effects on lawful residents, the passage of Proposition 187 galvanized grassroots organizing and Latino voters to turn the tide on California's political landscape to become more pro-immigrant and progressive. Latino voter participation in state elections following Proposition 187 increased substantially, paving the road for more progressive Democratic leaders and Latinos in political office (Colbern 2021; Gulasekaram and



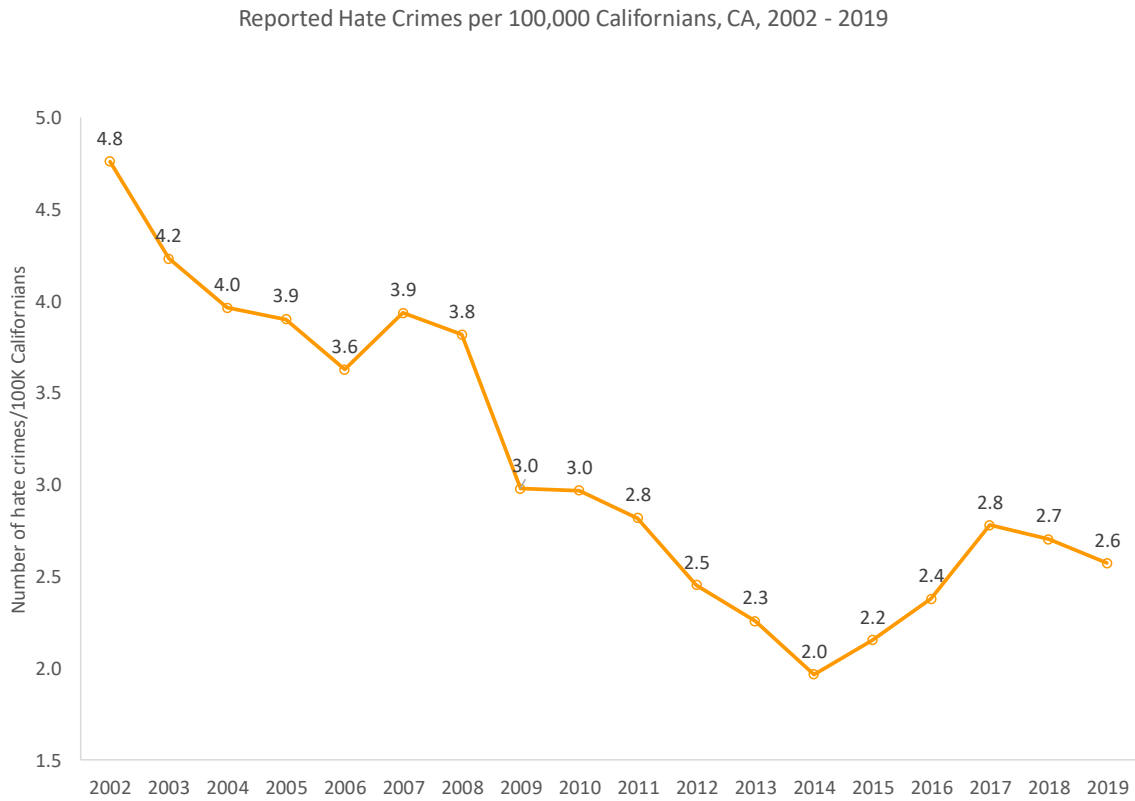
Ramakrishnan 2015). Through this period and the next decade, with a wave of pro-immigrant supporters, grassroots organizing and a network of activists and policymakers played a vital role in building an infrastructure of services, policies, and advocacy that laid the groundwork in making California the immigrant-friendly state that we now see (Colbern and Ramakrishnan 2018).

In the remainder of this section, we discuss how California's push for pro-immigrant policies in recent decades has begun to address its past anti-immigrant history. In times when marginalized immigrant groups, such as undocumented immigrants, lack protection and resources from the federal government, California and many of its localities are now stepping up as a place of sanctuary and relief—leading the country in expanding immigrant rights. Despite some regional differences in political attitudes, particularly in the Far North and interior counties bordering Nevada, immigrants' contributions are widely acknowledged in California and immigrant-inclusive policies are garnering majority support among Californians (Baldassare et al. 2021; McGhee 2020).

In the latest hate crime report released by the California Attorney General's Office, the number of hate crime events has varied considerably year to year. In 2019, as shown in Figure 63, the rate of hate crimes reported was 2.6 per 100,000 people compared to 2.7 in 2018. However, this is still higher than in 2014 when reported hate crimes throughout the state were at an all-time low with a rate of 2.0 per 100,000 people. Nearly 52.0 percent of hate crimes reported in 2019 were motivated by bias toward the victim's race/ethnicity or ancestry, though the number of anti-Black and anti-Latino bias events fell by 12.0 and 26.2 percent, respectively. These trends differ greatly from reported hate incidents and crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic; one year later, hate crime events had increased 31.0 percent and events motivated by racial bias had increased 67.3 percent.

In 2020, anti-Black bias events rose by 87.7 percent and anti-Latino events by 38.2 percent. These hate crime data are limited because they do not fully capture all hate incidents, including bias and discrimination. Additionally, many hate crimes go unreported due to differences in policies across law enforcement agencies, investigation procedures, and individuals' likelihood to report. Immigrants, in particular, are less likely to report hate crimes due to fear of interacting with law enforcement (California Department of Justice 2020).

**Figure 63: Reported Hate Crimes per 100,000 Californians, CA, 2002 to 2019**



Source: 2019 Hate Crime Report from California Department of Justice; U.S. Census Bureau, available at <https://data-openjustice.doj.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/Hate%20Crime%20In%20CA%202019.pdf>

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, anti-Asian discrimination and hate crime across the country grew exponentially. Nationally, over 9,000 anti-Asian hate incidences between March 2020 and June 2021 have been reported to [Stop AAPI Hate](#)—a California-based coalition seeking to address the rising violence and discrimination against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (Russell Jeung et al. 2021). A significant share (38.6 percent) of these reported anti-Asian incidents occurred in California. California has the largest Asian-American population in the country, approximately 65 percent of whom are immigrants. In protecting Asian Americans, California should consider immigrant-specific resources that will effectively help this growing community with diverse needs (e.g., language and culturally appropriate communication and policies). In July 2021, in what was deemed a historic investment, California allocated \$156 million toward alternatives to combat increasing anti-Asian violence and hate, including support for victims. This investment is the largest of its kind in addressing anti-Asian hate—much larger than other states’ investments, including New York’s \$10 million dedicated to combating anti-Asian violence (Wang 2021).

In 2015, California passed SB 600, which added “citizenship or immigration status” to the protected classes under the Unruh Civil Rights Act (California Legislature 2015). This extended the anti-discrimination protections under the Act to immigrants of all statuses. Namely, the Act entitled immigrants to full and equal accommodations in all business establishments, regardless of their citizenship or immigration status. This provision was especially important in protecting immigrants against housing discrimination—prior to the Act, property owners discriminated or threatened immigrants with impunity. After the passage of SB 600, property owners could no longer legally deny housing to immigrants based on their status, or threaten them in housing-related matters. Most recently, in September 2021, California enacted AB 600 to include immigration status as a protected class in regards to protection from hate crimes (California Legislature 2021). Policies such as these show the steps California is taking to protect immigrants in the state from discrimination and hate.

Beyond increasing protections for immigrants, California has also expanded immigrant rights in regard to their access to public benefits—a stark contrast to its past adoption of policies like Proposition 187. In the last few years alone, immigrants have lived through one of the most explicitly anti-immigrant administrations in the country’s history and a global pandemic that has left many reliant on safety nets and public benefits that often exclude immigrants, particularly those without lawful status. This includes the state’s expansion of Medi-Cal to ensure more immigrants have access to health insurance and healthcare. In 2016, California was one of only a few states that offer healthcare coverage to all children who meet the income eligibility requirement, regardless of immigration status. In 2020, in response to the pressure from the immigrant-led #Health4All Campaign, California expanded Medi-Cal to undocumented immigrants up to the age of 26 (California Immigrant Policy Center 2020).

California’s current state policies around health insurance are perhaps among the most progressive in the country. Immigrants in California are relatively more likely than immigrants in most other states to have access to health insurance—a necessary resource to improve the livelihood and integration of immigrant communities. More specifically, in 2019, 85.1 percent of immigrants in California have health insurance coverage—the thirteenth-highest rate in the United States (see Figure 64).

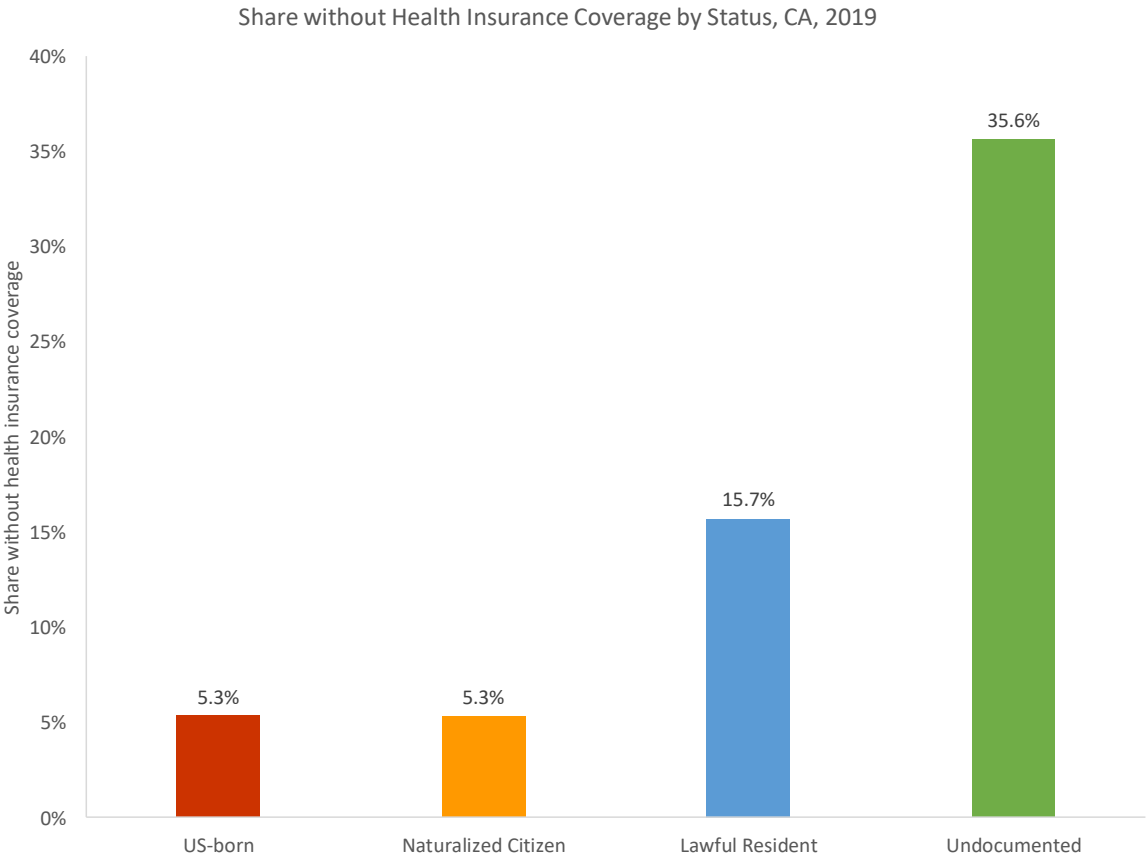
**Figure 64: Percent with Health Insurance by State, Nativity, and Immigration Status, 2019**

State	U.S.-born	Immigrant	Naturalized Citizen	Lawful Resident	Undocumented
Alabama	90.6%	66.5%	87.3%	74.3%	34.5%
Alaska	86.9%	83.6%	88.2%	80.6%	67.1%
Arizona	90.9%	75.2%	89.8%	77.5%	49.8%
Arkansas	92.0%	67.5%	87.7%	72.7%	43.8%
California	94.7%	85.1%	94.7%	84.3%	64.4%
Colorado	93.8%	74.4%	92.0%	77.8%	45.9%
Connecticut	96.5%	81.6%	94.3%	79.9%	51.8%
Delaware	95.0%	82.0%	94.1%	84.1%	59.0%
District of Columbia	97.0%	91.3%	96.9%	92.6%	75.8%
Florida	89.1%	76.4%	88.2%	71.9%	44.8%
Georgia	88.0%	67.3%	86.9%	71.0%	36.2%
Hawaii	96.7%	92.9%	96.5%	90.8%	82.0%
Idaho	90.2%	69.8%	86.3%	72.8%	45.1%
Illinois	95.0%	79.6%	92.4%	78.3%	54.1%
Indiana	91.9%	76.0%	90.1%	80.0%	51.1%
Iowa	96.0%	82.3%	93.8%	83.9%	61.6%
Kansas	92.5%	70.1%	89.0%	76.2%	40.6%
Kentucky	94.6%	75.2%	91.1%	80.2%	46.3%
Louisiana	90.8%	64.3%	87.2%	71.2%	29.3%
Maine	92.1%	90.4%	93.7%	87.7%	81.9%
Maryland	95.9%	80.6%	94.1%	81.4%	50.1%
Massachusetts	97.9%	93.6%	97.2%	92.6%	85.0%
Michigan	94.7%	87.8%	93.9%	87.0%	70.1%
Minnesota	96.2%	86.1%	94.4%	85.8%	63.5%
Mississippi	87.4%	61.3%	84.3%	68.0%	28.6%
Missouri	90.7%	79.7%	88.8%	80.7%	56.0%
Montana	91.0%	86.4%	91.4%	84.9%	68.2%
Nebraska	93.0%	73.0%	85.8%	78.6%	48.9%
Nevada	91.5%	74.7%	91.4%	75.2%	43.5%
New Hampshire	94.2%	87.0%	94.0%	82.5%	68.7%
New Jersey	95.4%	79.7%	92.2%	76.3%	49.5%
New Mexico	92.1%	69.4%	88.4%	73.1%	39.3%
New York	96.0%	86.8%	94.9%	85.1%	63.5%
North Carolina	91.0%	65.7%	87.5%	72.6%	35.5%
North Dakota	92.7%	80.3%	85.6%	79.3%	68.8%
Ohio	93.9%	84.2%	92.9%	83.5%	59.9%
Oklahoma	86.7%	64.5%	86.7%	71.6%	35.9%
Oregon	94.1%	81.4%	93.6%	84.1%	58.0%
Pennsylvania	94.5%	84.8%	93.5%	82.9%	63.3%
Rhode Island	96.7%	88.0%	94.9%	85.1%	69.4%
South Carolina	90.2%	66.8%	88.1%	72.6%	35.2%
South Dakota	90.7%	80.8%	90.9%	80.3%	60.5%
Tennessee	91.2%	64.2%	86.9%	71.2%	32.7%
Texas	86.0%	62.0%	83.2%	66.5%	34.9%
Utah	92.2%	69.5%	88.0%	72.9%	42.7%
Vermont	96.1%	93.7%	97.2%	90.1%	86.1%
Virginia	92.9%	77.9%	91.6%	77.7%	47.6%
Washington	95.3%	83.1%	94.2%	85.3%	58.0%
West Virginia	93.9%	85.6%	93.2%	85.0%	59.8%
Wisconsin	95.0%	79.4%	92.8%	82.2%	50.4%
Wyoming	89.2%	68.7%	87.9%	80.6%	33.4%
United States	92.5%	78.9%	91.9%	79.0%	51.7%

Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: Universe includes all people in households (no group quarters). See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated health and health care disparities within immigrant communities. However, even prior to the pandemic, a multitude of factors, including overcrowded housing and lack of health insurance, simultaneously made some immigrant communities more vulnerable to infection and poorer health conditions. An estimated 8.0 percent of Californians do not have health coverage. When disaggregated by immigration status and nativity (see Figure 65), these disparities are especially stark and concerning under a public health crisis. While 5.3 percent of U.S.-born Californians do not have healthcare coverage, nearly 15.0 percent of immigrants in California are without health insurance. Lawful resident (15.7 percent) and undocumented immigrants (35.6 percent) are more likely than naturalized citizens (5.3 percent) to not have any health insurance coverage.

**Figure 65: Share without Health Insurance Coverage by Status, CA, 2019**

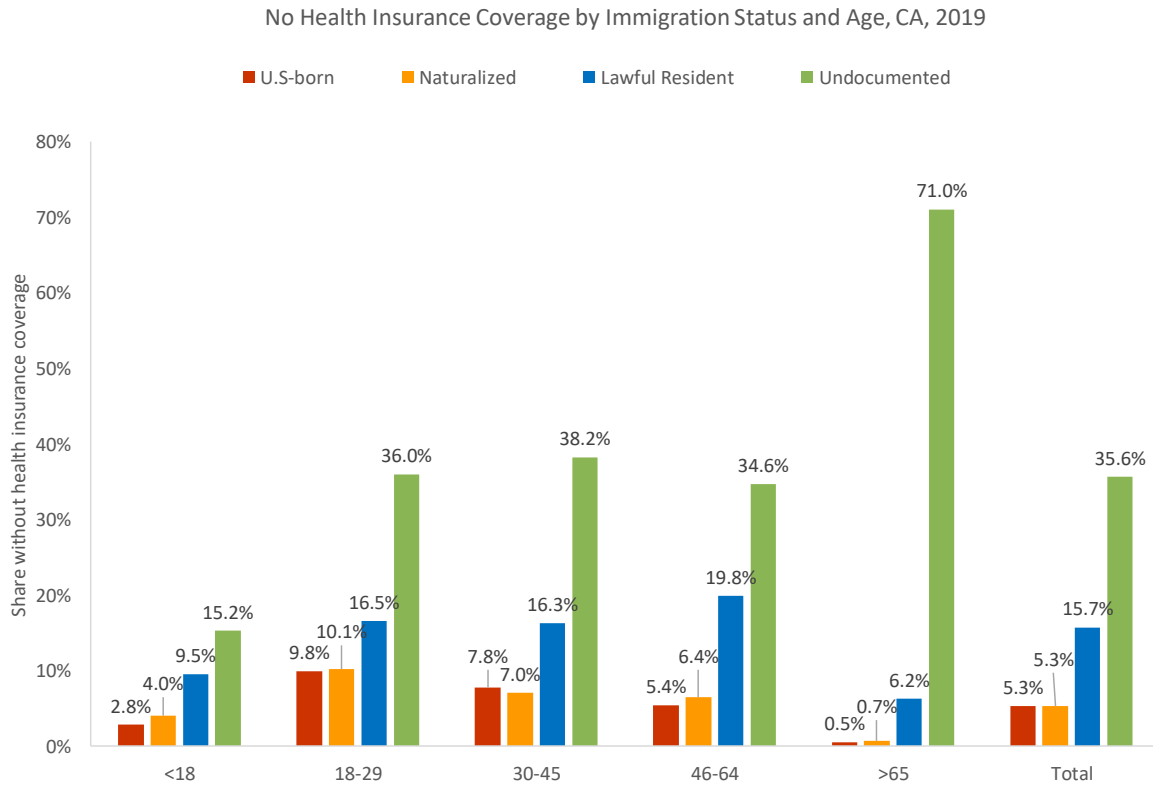


Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: Universe includes all people in households (no group quarters). See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

These statistics are particularly alarming when broken down by age group. As shown in Figure 66, 71.0 percent of undocumented immigrants age 65 and older are without health insurance coverage. In contrast, 6.2 percent of lawful residents, 0.7 percent of naturalized citizens, and 0.5 percent of the U.S.-born population age 65 and older lack health insurance coverage. This will change, however, as

Governor Newsom signed a bill in 2021 that will expand healthcare coverage to all low-income Californians ages 50 years and older, regardless of immigration status, beginning in May 2022. This is a pivotal victory for advocates fighting for immigrant rights and rights for the elderly as this group faces disproportionate barriers to health care despite their greater needs for care (Gutierrez 2021).

**Figure 66: Percent with No Health Insurance by Immigration Status and Age Group, 2019**



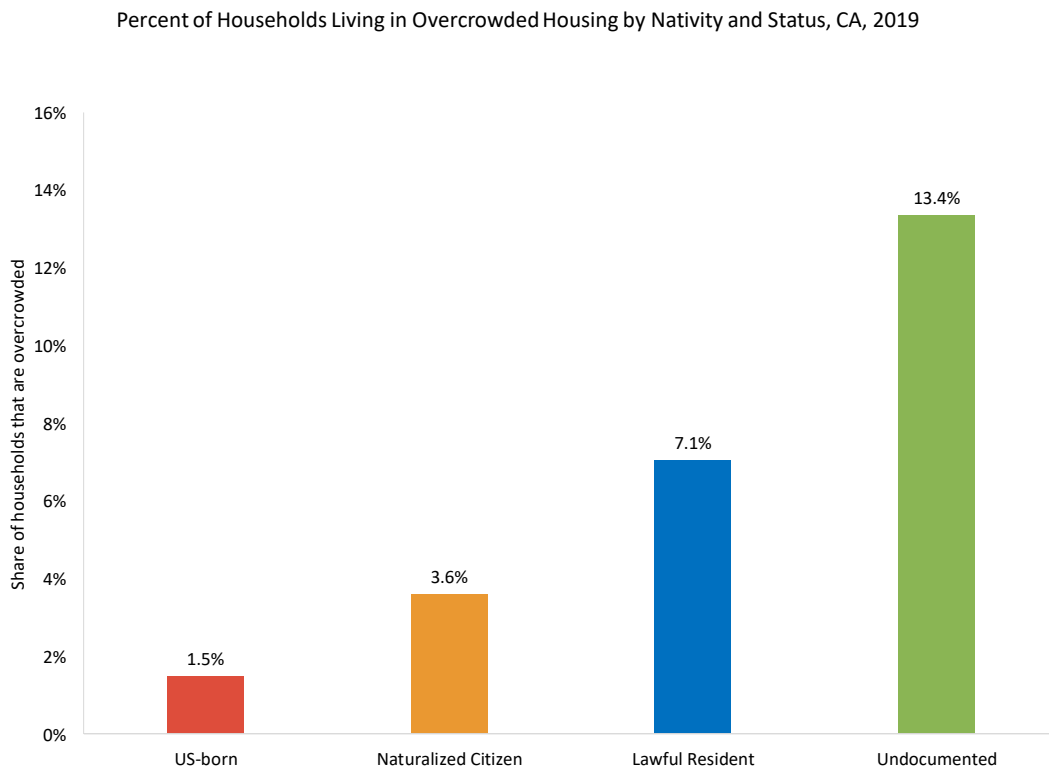
Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: Universe includes all people in households (no group quarters). See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

Despite these different policies that ensure immigrants, regardless of status, have access to health care, a chilling effect from previous restrictive policies may challenge the efficacy of the recent efforts to provide immigrants with more public benefits. Most recently, the Trump Administration worked to change the rules and requirements of the Public Charge law, which is a provision within the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), to restrict certain immigrants' access to federal benefits such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (ILRC 2020). After a lengthy legal battle, the Trump administration's proposed changes to Public Charge were struck down by federal courts. However, despite qualifying for these resources, the fear brought about by these proposed changes continues to plague immigrant communities from accessing much-needed social and health benefits (Bernstein et al. 2021; Gonzalez et al. 2021). Taking steps to narrow this disparity, immigrant-serving organizations, such

as [TODEC Legal Center](#), [CHIRLA](#), [the California Immigrant Policy Center](#), and campaigns like #Health4All, have been mobilizing alongside immigrant communities to ensure their access.

In shaping the warmth of welcome and immigrants’ ability to stay in California, we need to also consider the housing conditions available to immigrants. As mentioned previously, households headed by immigrants (57.5 percent and 35.2 percent) are more likely than households headed by U.S.-born Californians (51.8 percent and 28.9 percent) to be rent- and housing-burdened. The differences are starker when disaggregated by immigration status, where undocumented immigrants are significantly more likely to be rent- and housing-burdened—65.1 percent and 42.7 percent, respectively. High rent and housing costs can contribute to Californians’ likelihood to live in crowded and unsafe housing conditions. As shown in Figure 67, 1.5 percent of households headed by U.S.-born Californians live in overcrowded housing. In comparison, 3.6 percent of households headed by naturalized citizens, 7.1 percent of households headed by lawful residents, and 13.4 percent of households headed by undocumented immigrants in California live in overcrowded housing.

**Figure 67: Percent of Households Living in Overcrowded Housing by Nativity and Status, CA, 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: Universe includes householders (no group quarters). Overcrowded is defined as more than 1.5 people per room. See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

In California’s more costly regions, overcrowding is more likely to occur, with immigrants seeing greater rates than U.S.-born Californians (see Figure 68). In the San Francisco and Marin County region, 19.9 percent of households headed by undocumented immigrants, 9.2 percent of households headed by lawful residents, and 5.9 percent of households headed by naturalized citizens live in overcrowded housing. Immigrant-headed households see similar rates in Los Angeles County with 18.0 percent of households headed by undocumented immigrants, 9.6 percent of households headed by lawful residents, and 4.5 percent of households headed by naturalized citizens living in overcrowded housing. The federal government plays an important role in providing immigrants safe and affordable housing through voucher systems and subsidized housing. However, federal policies (e.g., public charge rule) can limit access to such resources, thus forcing immigrants into overcrowded housing because of cost and availability.

**Figure 68: Percent of Households Living in Overcrowded Housing by Nativity, Status, and Region, CA, 2019**

	U.S.-Born	Naturalized Citizen	Lawful Resident	Undocumented
Central Coast	1.0%	3.6%	5.9%	17.2%
Central Valley	1.6%	2.8%	3.9%	6.5%
East Bay	1.2%	3.0%	5.7%	10.4%
Inland Empire	1.4%	2.5%	5.0%	8.5%
Los Angeles	2.3%	4.5%	9.6%	18.0%
Monterey-San Benito	2.1%	4.2%	9.0%	16.0%
Napa-Sonoma-Solano	0.9%	2.4%	6.2%	8.7%
Far North	0.9%	2.6%	2.7%	6.5%
Orange	1.3%	3.5%	6.8%	17.9%
Sacramento	0.8%	2.2%	4.0%	7.0%
San Diego-Imperial	1.3%	2.9%	6.6%	11.3%
SF-Marin	1.7%	5.9%	9.2%	19.9%
Sierra	0.5%	1.4%	1.7%	3.5%
Silicon Valley	1.5%	3.2%	6.3%	10.5%
California	1.5%	3.6%	7.1%	13.4%

Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: Universe includes householders (no group quarters). Overcrowded is defined as more than 1.5 people per room. See Pastor, Le, and Scoggins (2021) for details on estimates of the undocumented population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

California has begun to address some of these disparities by implementing policies that protect immigrant tenants and their families, especially those without lawful status. In 2017, California enacted AB 291, also referred to as the Immigrant Tenant Protection Act, which provides protections to immigrant renters from landlord harassment (Nemeth 2017). Landlords could face civil penalties if they threaten a renter to vacate their rental unit by exposing their immigration status. Additionally, the bill



protects undocumented renters from being forced to provide landlords a Social Security number or other identifying documents after a landlord has approved the tenant for occupancy. Legislation such as AB 291 addresses the housing discrimination that undocumented immigrants face, and provides them with additional recourse to fight such discrimination.

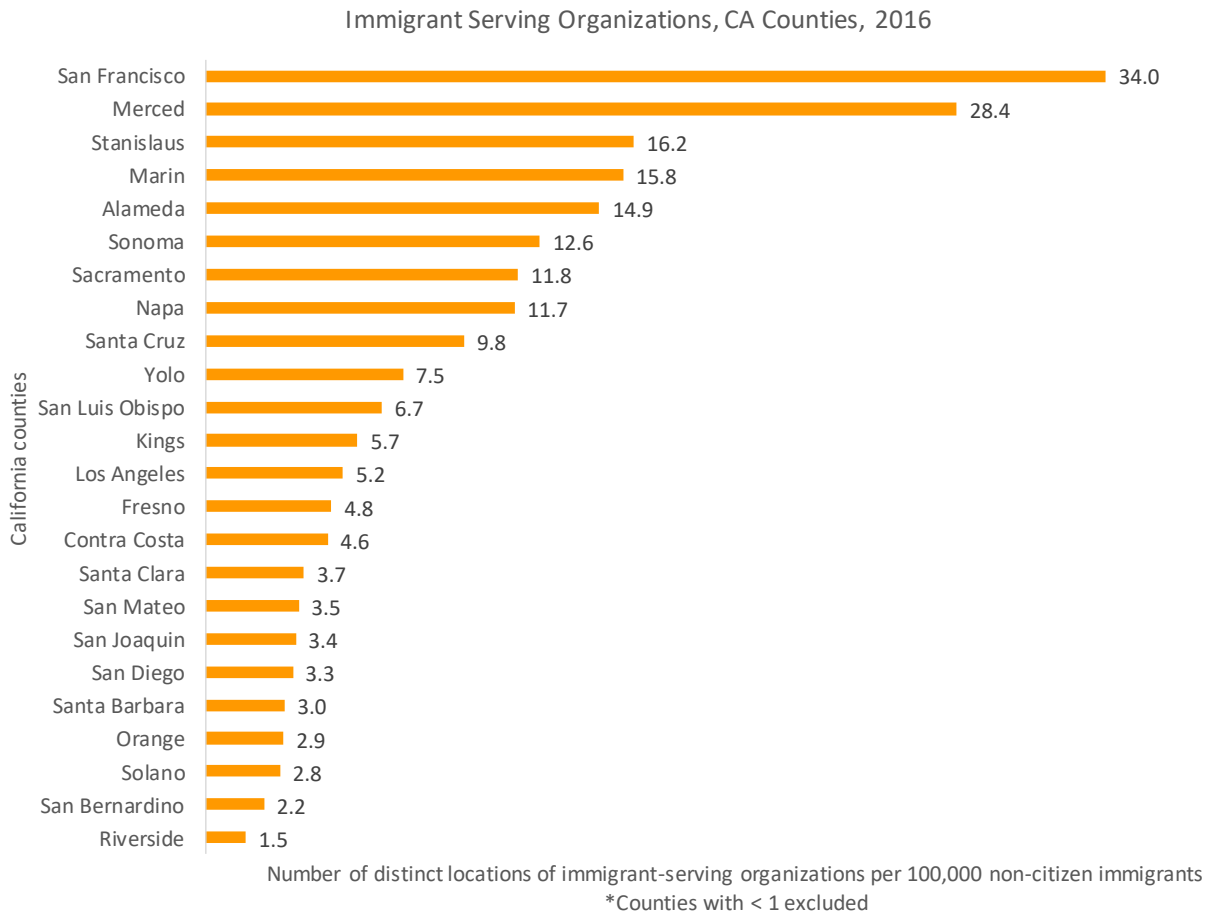
During the COVID-19 pandemic, California also expanded financial benefits and rent relief for undocumented immigrants who are experiencing pandemic-related hardship. Undocumented immigrants are broadly excluded from federal COVID-19 relief packages. California, however, is providing one-time, \$500 direct assistance to undocumented immigrants who are ineligible for other forms of assistance, including those stipulated under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, because of their immigration status. Though this is a step forward in providing necessary aid to the undocumented immigrant community, it is still limited in that a maximum of only \$1,000 in assistance is allowed per household and is only available for up to 150,000 undocumented immigrant adults. We estimate that there are nearly 2.3 million undocumented immigrant adults in California.

Accessibility of services is another dimension pertinent to the context of reception for immigrants. In particular, a warm, welcoming place has a strong infrastructure of immigrant-serving agencies and organizations that are able to serve immigrants of various statuses and their specific needs. The California Department of Social Services created the One California funding program in 2014 in response to immigrant rights advocates' demands for greater state investment in immigrant-serving organizations (CIPC 2020). The One California program provides educational services, outreach, application assistance, legal representation, and capacity building funds for immigrant-serving organizations throughout California. Through its yearly investments in these organizations, the One California program has bolstered the capacity and reach of immigrant serving organizations to provide greater services to immigrants, especially around legal representation and community organizing.

Most recently, the California Department of Social Services relied on immigrant-serving non-profit organizations to help eligible undocumented immigrant adults apply for and receive forms of disaster relief previously discussed. The on-the-ground networks, overall connectedness of these organizations in immigrant communities, and broader political and organizational landscape showcase the consistent work that immigrant organizations undertake day-to-day to build the capacity needed to meet moments like the COVID-19 pandemic (Hernandez 2021).

Immigrant-serving organizations are important in providing for communities when governments fail to. They are able to provide culturally appropriate services to different immigrant communities while being sensitive to their specific challenges, including legal barriers related to their immigration status. According to Guidestar, there are six immigrant-serving organizations per 100,000 noncitizen immigrants. However, it is important to note that certain regions have access to more immigrant-serving organizations than others (see Figure 69). Across counties in California, San Francisco ranks most accessible with 34 immigrant-serving organizations per 100,000 noncitizen immigrant residents. In some counties, like Kern County, there are no local immigrant-serving organizations.

**Figure 69: Immigrant Serving Organizations, CA Counties, 2016**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2016 Guidestar data.

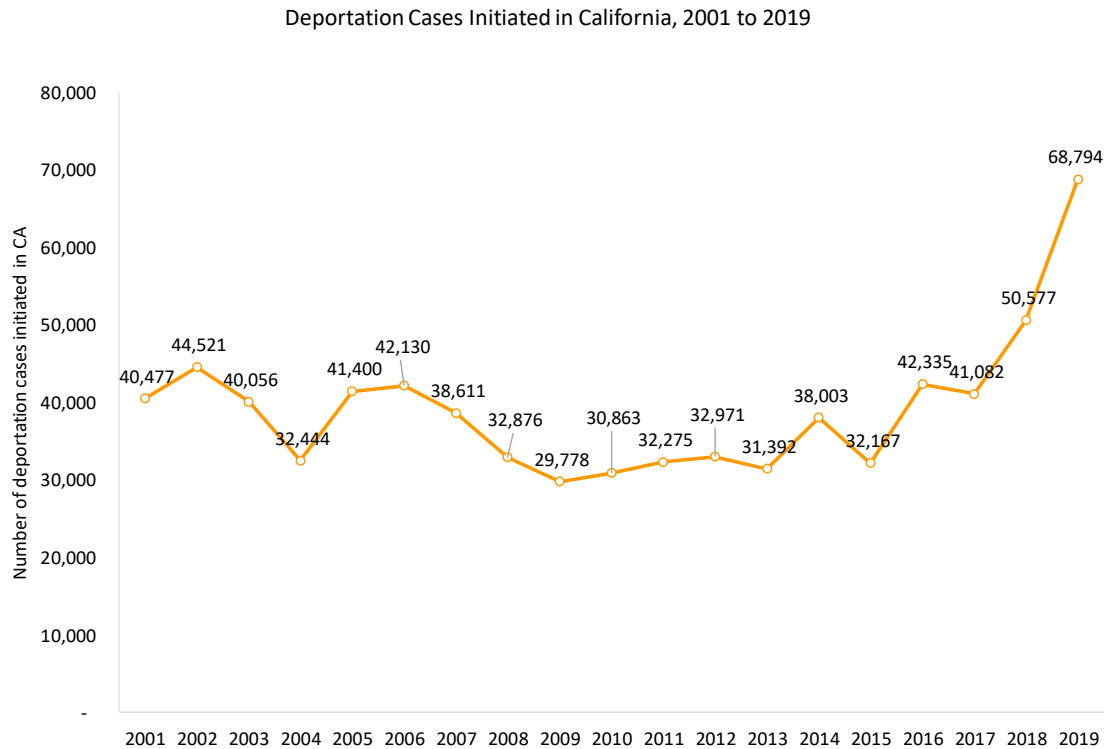
This lack of resources and services is worth noting because immigrant communities in these areas may disproportionately rely on informal networks and organizations that do not have the capacity, oversight, or structure to effectively serve the region’s immigrant population. One well-known informal service constantly advertised to vulnerable immigrant groups in California is “notario” legal services. “Notarios” are unlicensed consultants that usually offer immigration legal assistance despite not having a license to practice law in the state (Cutler 2019). Many immigration attorneys and legal practitioners agree that the “legal advice” given to immigrants by “notarios” is often inaccurate, insufficient, or wholly wrong, and has detrimental consequences for their immigration cases. For these reasons, California has sought to establish funding mechanisms and requirements for immigration legal services organizations to ensure that there is oversight and proper management of the practice of immigration law. Immigrant-serving organizations have played a vital role throughout California’s history in advocating for immigrant rights and providing services to help integrate immigrants, including refugees and undocumented immigrants.

Another key component of California's warmth of welcome is its relationship with federal immigration enforcement. Prior to the Trump administration, California faced bold attempts from the federal government to control and limit immigration, particularly at the southern U.S. border. In 1994, Operation Gatekeeper was an attempt by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to bolster Border Patrol's capacity and to deploy greater enforcement resources throughout the border region (Durand and Massey 2003). Border Patrol did not only drastically increase its capacity to surveil the San Diego/ Tijuana region, its presence in the interior throughout Southern California also dramatically grew after the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), resulting in more enforcement and fear among immigrant communities. A 1993 state law passed by then-Republican Governor Pete Wilson expanded such enforcement by mandating state prisons' cooperation with federal immigration authorities (Pastor 2018).

California's recent policy attempts to deter federal immigration enforcement within the state involve a series of protection acts. In 2011, California passed The Employment Acceleration Act (AB 1236) which prohibited the state from mandating private employers' use of E-Verify—a federal system to check employees' legal status. The use of E-Verify by any California employers on existing employees or potential employees prior to any conditional offer was banned entirely in 2015 with AB 622. In 2013, California passed the Transparency and Responsibility Using State Tools (TRUST) Act (AB 4), which prohibits local and municipal jails from detaining immigrants held for low-level, non-violent offenses for deportation purposes (Colbern 2021). This limits California's participation in the Secure Communities deportation program—a federal program enforced by the Department of Homeland Security to identify immigrants in local jails who violate immigration law and are thus subject to deportation. In 2016, California passed the Truth Act to provide detained immigrants their due process by requiring local and municipal jails to provide immigrants and their legal counsel advance notice of any Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) hold requests prior to any attempt of moving the detained to federal custody.

In 2017, California became a "sanctuary state" through Senate Bill 54, also known as the California Values Act. This enactment prohibited local law enforcement agencies from aiding federal agents in detaining immigrants who are potentially at risk of deportation. Some local jurisdictions in the state followed suit in adopting resolutions to become sanctuary cities, but there were also localities that contested the state law, such as Huntington Beach. Despite being a sanctuary state, however, the number of deportation cases initiated in California has increased significantly in recent years (see Figure 70). According to the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) at Syracuse University, there were nearly 69,000 deportation cases initiated across California in 2019. This is a significant increase from the approximate 50,500 cases initiated in 2018. Of the cases in 2019, about 42 percent were issued a removal order as of 2020. Nearly 76 percent of the deportation cases without legal representation were issued removal orders compared to 16 percent of cases that were represented legally, once again highlighting the critical importance of ensuring access to immigration legal services throughout California.

**Figure 70: Deportation Cases Initiated in California, 2001 to 2019**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis using Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC), Syracuse University, [trac.syr.edu](https://trac.syr.edu), State and County Details on Deportation Proceedings in Immigration Court, <https://trac.syr.edu/phptools/immigration/nta/>.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and specifically, ICE, had a politicized role during the Trump administration when they targeted sanctuary jurisdictions, such as California. After the passage of the California Values Act (SB 54), then-ICE Acting Director Thomas Homan issued a stark opposition to the bill's protection of undocumented immigrants (Homan 2017). The following year, ICE revved up its enforcement operations in California and Acting Director Homan once again blamed California's sanctuary policies as the reason behind ICE increasing its presence (Aleaziz 2018). During this time, the Trump administration bolstered its anti-immigrant policy agenda and hateful rhetoric towards immigrants and states like California that opposed federal immigration enforcement. ICE's increased presence and enforcement in California during this time was, at the very least, political in rationale. Although SB 54 and local policies enacting sanctuary city guidelines have been found to reduce immigration arrests (Asian Americans Advancing Justice 2019), full compliance with the state sanctuary laws varies across the state.

Immigrants of all nationalities and backgrounds have been the target of immigration enforcement and deportation, however, Latinos from Mexico and certain Central American countries make up the bulk of these cases. From 2001 to 2019, there were over 740,000 deportation cases initiated in California. As

shown in Figure 71, nearly 45 percent of these cases are immigrants from Mexico, followed by 13.9 percent from El Salvador, 12.8 percent from Guatemala, 5 percent from Honduras, 4.2 percent from China, 3.1 percent from India, and 1.5 percent from the Philippines. All other nationalities make up the remaining 14.7 percent.

Recent policies on immigration have helped to shape these trends. In 2018, then-U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions issued the decision of *Matter of A-B-*, which revised a national legal precedent that protected domestic violence survivors under U.S. asylum law. By reversing this precedent, Attorney General Sessions effectively limited the types of cases that qualify for asylum in the U.S. (Center for Gender & Refugee Studies 2019). Many migrants from Central American countries such as El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala have been fleeing in recent years due to domestic violence and gender persecution in their home countries (HRF 2019). Through the *Matter of A-B-* decision, many of these asylum seekers became ineligible for asylum in the U.S. For those asylum seekers who were already present in the U.S., they now faced the threat of immigration enforcement and deportation. As the data shows, among the largest number of deportation cases are immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

**Figure 71: Top Countries of Origins for Court Deportation Proceedings Initiated in California, 2001 to 2019**

Country of Origin	Number of Cases	% of Total Cases
Mexico	332,323	44.8%
El Salvador	102,911	13.9%
Guatemala	94,766	12.8%
Honduras	37,233	5.0%
China	30,766	4.2%
India	23,009	3.1%
Philippines	11,353	1.5%
Armenia	9,078	1.2%
Indonesia	5,936	0.8%
Nicaragua	5,367	0.7%
Iran	4,579	0.6%
Brazil	4,140	0.6%
Russia	3,912	0.5%
Vietnam	3,583	0.5%
South Korea	3,482	0.5%

Public opinion on immigrants is generally favorable among Californians. The latest survey from the [Public Policy Institute of California \(PPIC\)](#) finds that 85 percent of Californian adults support a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants with significant support from all major political parties: 93 percent of Democrats, 68 percent of Republicans, and 81 percent of Independents (Baldassare et al.

2021). Though still favorable, there is less public support for providing healthcare coverage for undocumented immigrants. PPIC finds that 66 percent of Californian adults agree that undocumented immigrants should have access to healthcare coverage. While 82 percent of Democrats are in favor of such a policy, only 20 percent of Republicans and 57 percent of Independents agree. Beyond these two major immigration policy issues, Californians have been found to have, overall, more welcoming views towards immigrants than the rest of the country (Hajnal, Lee, and Pathakis 2021).

Public opinion is important in shaping the political feasibility of policies that ultimately form the state's context of reception. As California has become more diverse, public opinion has become more pro-immigrant and subsequently created a more welcoming environment for immigrants. Hajnal, Lee, and Pathakis (2021) argue that "as the country becomes more diverse and moves toward a majority-minority nation, it too will shift markedly to the left on immigration" (p. 203). However, as we note below, this is not necessarily automatic even for California, particularly if current political leaders seek to emphasize opportunities for the second-generation children of immigrants (who may also be more likely to be voters). And certainly, the sort of anti-immigrant fervor that has gripped the nation in the last several years could be either the gasp of a dying order or a frightening glimpse of things to come.

## Trends for the Future

What are the important trends that are affecting immigrant integration in California today and will likely affect the scenarios we consider in the next phase of this exercise? There are several and they cut in very different directions. Below, we consider the changing composition of immigrant flows, the aging of the California population, the high likelihood of migration due to climate crises, ongoing shifts in the labor market, possible shifts in national and state politics, and perhaps the biggest shift of all for the Golden State: California will have to stop assuming that immigrants will come and learn to start competing for their talents.

### CHANGING COMPOSITION OF IMMIGRANT FLOWS

One important context for the future involves understanding the changing nature of who is arriving and settling in California. In Figure 72, we look at the country of origin for recent arrivals in the state for both 2000 and 2019.<sup>6</sup> As can be seen, immigrants from Mexico dominated the new arrivals in 2000, comprising about half of those who had immigrated in the previous two years. Much of that was likely driven by economic turmoil in Mexico, particularly the disruptions caused by the adoption of the North American Free Trade Act and the peso crash in 1994.<sup>7</sup> But by 2019, the share of new arrivals who hailed from Mexico had fallen to 16.3 percent.

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<sup>6</sup> Recent arrivals are defined by their country or origin and where they arrived in the last two years. Because the ACS is a rolling sample and the question is based on year of arrival, the data for 2019 may be more of a snapshot of the previous 18-20 months.

<sup>7</sup> The share of new arrivals from Mexico who settled in California actually went up from 42 percent in 1990; that figure was actually not much above the 38 percent in 1980, suggesting that there was more dislocation from Mexico's economic transformations in the 1990s than from the debt crisis of the 1980s. We do not present this data in the text because for 1990, it's a three-year grouping and for 1980, it's a five year grouping, hence not as comparable as our approach to 2000 and 2019.

**Figure 72. Country of Origin of Recent Immigrants in California, 2000 and 2019**

Country or Region of Origin of Recent Immigrants in California

	2000	2019
Mexico	50.2%	16.3%
Central America	6.5%	9.1%
China	5.2%	16.0%
India	4.9%	12.9%
Phillipines	4.3%	6.1%
Korea	3.2%	4.2%
Europe	8.6%	9.4%
Rest of Asia	6.9%	9.0%
Rest of Latin Americ	3.0%	4.9%
Middle East	2.5%	5.4%
Africa	1.6%	3.3%
Rest of World	3.1%	3.5%

Source: 2000 Census, 2019 American Community Survey

As shown above, that share was nearly matched by the new arrivals from China, a percentage that was much higher than in 2000. There were boosts in the share of new arrivals from India and the Philippines, as well as from the rest of Asia and the Middle East. While there was also an increase in the share of immigrants from Central America and the other parts of Latin America, the main story is that the big new contributors to California's immigrant population are Asian countries; if aggregated, they total 48.1 percent, nearly equal to the share of new arrivals that Mexicans exhibited in the 2000 Census.

The Central American phenomenon presents particular issues and reflects the economic, political, and social crises in the so-called "northern triangle of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. While the data are not strictly comparable because of slightly different time periodization, the share of recent Central American immigrants in California was around 6 percent in 1980 and then grew to about 10 percent in 1990, with the increase likely due to the instability of the civil wars that wracked that area. By 2000, the share of recent arrivals was back at a more historic 6 percent and it is now topping 9 percent.

What are the big headlines from these trends? The current decline in migration from Mexico is long-term in its origins, reflecting a significant shift in fertility rates and the ways that it is now rippling through to the young adult population who would traditionally be primed to migrate (Miles 2017). It is also the case that the Mexican economy has become stable, diminishing the impact of another push

factor. This will generally mean fewer less-educated immigrants arriving from Mexico, attenuating the issues that have presented themselves in the past in terms of necessary state support.

Asian migration is likely to continue growing as a share of the flow to both the U.S. and California. As we have seen above, this is a highly bifurcated group, with some highly educated and some less able to succeed in labor markets. What will likely play out is a push to naturalize these immigrants and political jockeying to secure the loyalty of these voters. Conservatives have long had a chance with Asian Americans, partly because of some adherence to “traditional values” as well as the anti-communist leanings of certain refugee groups. However, anti-immigrant politics have pushed Asian Americans increasingly toward the Democratic Party (Ramakrishnan 2016). In any case, the era of thinking of immigration as mostly a Latino issue will need to change.

The influx from Central America has its own dynamics and is likely to continue because of political and economic instability, local violence, and climate vulnerabilities. However, it will likely not be enough to offset the migration decline from Mexico. It will, however, include many migrants who are not well-educated or well-positioned for the most dynamic and well-paying jobs in the state; indeed, it will include more and more young children and struggling families who will need support. This will be a challenge for the immigrant advocates who have stressed the economic contributions of immigrants; a shift to rhetoric about humanitarian approaches will be needed.

## **DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE IN CALIFORNIA**

Another part of California’s demographic picture does not involve the usual focus on ethnic change: California is projected to have a higher share of people of color in the future, but the era of quick ethnic re-composition is largely over. Although such change will continue to occur in the rest of the country, the share of Californians who are people of color is expected to rise from about 62 percent today to around 66 percent, hardly a striking shift. The new demographic story is the aging of the California population: In 2010, about 11 percent of the state’s population was 65 or older; by 2060, that share is projected to increase to nearly 27 percent of the state’s population.<sup>8</sup>

This has given rise to discussions of how best to support the “care economy” (Poo 2015). The issue has particular salience because a better system—one not so reliant on families alone—would free up workers, particularly women, who are caught in between pressures to care for both their own children and parents. It is also a potential win-win since there are good reasons to expand jobs and improve working conditions, something that could benefit current immigrants and attract new ones.

There is an important part of the story that is often unmentioned—and it can be seen in Figure 73. Because we have become accustomed to the current “racial generation gap”—in which seniors are disproportionately white and younger generations are overwhelmingly youth of color—we forget an important fact: Latino, Asian, and Black people also age. The data in Figure 73 show that the median age for the state as a whole will rise and that the median age for Black Californians will more or less track

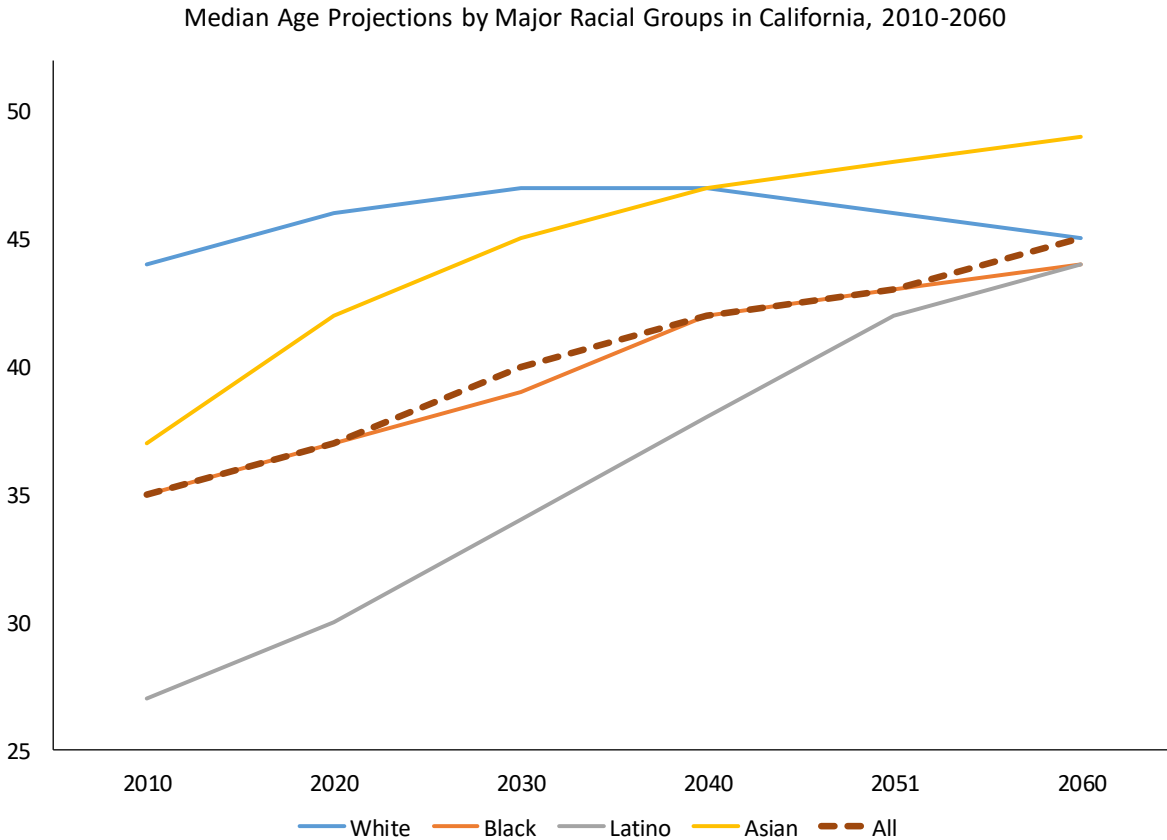
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<sup>8</sup> Data on the ethnic shares, percent seniors, and median age by major racial/ethnic group is taken from the demographic projections of the California Department of Finance; these have yet to be revised in light of the 2020 Census.



the average. However, the median age of the white population will peak in 2030 and subsequently fall, while the median age for Latinos and Asians will rise, particularly for the Latino population.

**Figure 73. Median Age Projections by Major Racial Groups in California, 2010-2060**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of United States, 1850-2019 data from IPUMS SDA (<https://usa.ipums.org/usa/sda/>).

Of course, the Latino and Asian communities are not just composed of immigrants—and there are white and Black immigrants—so this is an imperfect measure of our coming challenges. But coupling that together with the long-settled nature of immigrants in California is indicative of the aging of both immigrants themselves and their second generation children. This raises important questions about how a population that finds itself underpaid, under-insured, and often underwater in terms of wealth, will be able to retire with grace and dignity. This will be a central equity challenge in the future.

### CLIMATE CRISES

The wildfires of 2020 and 2021 have made clear that the era of climate change is here. The recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report suggests that future temperature increases are inevitable even as California seeks to lead in reducing greenhouse gas emissions (Plumer and Fountain 2021). From the point of view of migration to the U.S., the challenge is the projected shift in climate in Central America and the resulting combination of hurricanes and droughts that will force

people to move to urban areas, then to Mexico, and eventually the U.S. (Lustgarten 2020). This could add to the changes detailed above and generate an increase in less-skilled and clearly distressed immigrants.

These climate refugees may also come from other parts of the world although the path would be harder than from this hemisphere. What they will encounter is another sort of climate risk: the insecurity California's immigrants face when confronted with climate disasters in the state. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) can help to bail out homeowners who lose their homes to floods and other climate disasters. But immigrants, particularly those without legal status, are particularly vulnerable to losing income and housing, and are both shut out from and fearful of asking for assistance (Méndez, Flores-Haro, and Zucker 2020).

Both the migration flows and the vulnerabilities of the immigrant experience are likely to be important trends to track. Both are addressable: we could work to reduce the climate pressures and extend a broader safety net. However, there will also be an inevitable sense of trade-offs as things become more challenging for Californians overall, and as the costs of climate mitigation rise and potentially crowd out other necessary spending on successfully integrating immigrant families.

## **ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS**

California continues to have an economy that is both highly dynamic and highly unequal. Labor markets are separating in terms of wage outcomes, even as skill levels are bound together: as noted earlier, more software engineers mean more nannies, gardeners, food service workers, janitors, and the like. This is one reason why focusing on just attracting well-educated immigrants can miss the economics mark. Other parts of the country, which have relied on this mix for growth, are now discovering to their detriment that they are short of less-skilled workers (Jordan and Fondriest 2021).

This new reality of coupled skill levels means that we need to *both* push the economic drivers at the top *and* lift the workers at the bottom. This is especially important because multi-generational progress requires that families have economic and residential stability. This implies a need for rapidly expanding the supply of ESL classes, community college opportunities, and workforce development efforts, as well as continuing to move the minimum wage upward over time. It also implies the need to address the housing unaffordability crisis in California.

California will also find itself wanting to encourage international students and H1-B visa holders to find a way to stay and contribute to the economic trajectory of the state. Businesses will find themselves lobbying for those workers (as well as agricultural workers), and likely making political deals to be friendly and supportive of all immigrants. In any case, immigrants are often thought about as changing labor supply, but they are generally a response to shifting labor demand (Cornelius 1998; Cornelius, Espenshade, and Salehyan 2001).

## **POLITICAL SHIFTS**

Several political trends suggest that immigrant integration will be more and more top of mind for state policy makers. The first is the growing power of California's Latino, Asian American, and Pacific Islander

legislators who are, for a variety of reasons, sensitive to immigration issues. It is this group that has pushed in recent years to open up Medi-Cal and the Earned Income Tax Credit to undocumented Californians—and that pushed for the sort of disaster relief and immigrant inclusion that has been part of the state’s response to COVID-19. California, a state that rejected most forms of cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in a piece of legislation tellingly called the California Values Act, is likely to continue to be at the forefront of immigrant-friendly policies (Colbern and Ramakrishnan 2021; Ramakrishnan and Colbern 2015).

It is important to realize that this trend may not automatically continue. That is, while we tend to think of less welcoming policies as the product of white supremacy and racial anxiety, there can also be a sort of California nativism that wants to lock in the benefits of our educational systems and economy for an increasingly diverse generation of native-born Californians. We do not think that this is likely, but it is definitely not impossible and it will require political organizing to prevent such a phenomenon from developing.

A second political trend has to do with changing national attitudes about immigrants. Despite the current deadlock on immigration reform in D.C.—mostly because of a Republican party seemingly determined to make the same play for a declining share of the electorate that the California GOP did in the 1990s—federal policy change in a more immigrant-supportive direction seems likely in the future. Public polling generally shows that American support for more immigration is growing over time and support for immigration reform that would support a path to legalization is supported by a large majority of likely voters (Gallup 2021; Narea 2021).

As we suggested when considering “warmth of welcome,” California voters are especially sympathetic: in a time-consistent poll from the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), the share of likely voters in the state saying that immigrants are a benefit to California rose from about 50 percent in 2000 to 75 percent in 2021 (Public Policy Institute of California 2021). This is one reason why California lawmakers have had so much leeway to pursue empathetic and pro-immigrant policies. Whether that will continue—if California becomes isolated from federal policy and local costs of pursuing something different rise—remains to be determined.

A final potential trend on the political side may come from the increasing business pressure for reform and regulation due to the need for labor. While this would necessarily include some form of legalization, even at the level of a sort of state work permit once proposed by business and immigration advocates in Utah (Dwyer 2011), there will also likely be demands for more legal flows of workers of various skill levels and this will come from multiple sectors of our economy.

While ultimately that solution is federal, the demands for change could create further divisions between business interests and a Republican Party that is increasingly tilted toward “nativism” due to its reliance on a whiter and more rural political base. Particularly in California, businesses may no longer see the point of supporting GOP candidates and this will shift attention to political struggles between moderates and progressives in the Democratic Party. This could exacerbate the potential breaks from immigrant interests highlighted above.

## **COMPETING FOR IMMIGRANTS**

As we have noted, California has long thought of itself as an immigrant-rich state. It has also not thought it needed to do much to attract immigrants: build the Golden State and they will come. But the last ACS suggests that only 15.6 percent of immigrants who arrived in the last two years have settled in California, far below the nearly half we were attracting in the 1970s and 1980s. Previous politics and policies in California have either assumed that we needed to do little or actively sought to dissuade arrival. It will be a fundamental shift in mindset to reposition our perspective as a place that needs to attract.

Since it is unlikely that the state will opt for lower taxes or be able to lower housing prices to the level of other states, the competition for talent will be on the basis of quality of life—and in the case of immigrants, that will involve the “warmth of welcome” and the likelihood of upward economic mobility. This is going to require significant policy attention; and it also means that immigrant integration efforts will cut across a wide range of issues, such as housing, transportation, education, and jobs, and not just questions of enforcement, deportation, and a relative shielding from federal overreach.

This will be an important evolution in terms of policy frontiers in at least two ways. First, given the vulnerabilities of those without legal status—and the extent of mixed-status families—both immigrant advocates and policy makers have focused on that population. However, attention will need to be paid to immigrant entrepreneurs, multi-generational progress, promoting naturalization, and a slew of other areas of work aside from the general focus on reducing income inequality and facilitating mobility. In short, discussions around immigrant integration will need to expand and be more inclusive of a range of issue areas.

Second, these discussions and actions on immigrant integration will also need to be more strategic and long-term. For example, the state’s climate policy has a series of goals, policy recommendations, and benchmark targets. This is not true of the state’s immigrant integration agenda and one key task will be establishing a strategy planning mechanism for immigrant integration. We hope that the facts and analysis we have offered above can contribute to that important task and help to secure a better future for immigrant and native-born Californians alike.

## **Conclusion**

California’s immigrant integration agenda stands at a crossroads. After decades of being an immigrant mecca, the state’s share of foreign born is on the decline and its immigrant population is the most long-settled of any state in the U.S. It has earned a well-deserved reputation for being progressive and welcoming in tone—quite a contrast from the rampant xenophobia of the 1990s—but integration challenges remain and common ground issues, like high housing prices, are driving immigrants to choose other states.

It may seem easy to ignore these challenges—having had little problem attracting immigrants in the past, why do we need to start now? But our history of being immigrant-rich does not always square with being able to benefit from the talents, drive, and entrepreneurial spirit of those who have come to the

Golden State. While the high levels of labor force attachment and long-term shifts in language acquisition, for example, are consistent with the pattern for immigrants in the past, our economy is less able to provide paths to the middle class as evidenced by how immigrants are often plagued by low wages, high rent burdens, and low levels of home ownership.

Taking a more conscious approach to immigrant integration—rather than assuming it will occur on its own with more time in the country—is a shift for a nation and a state that has generally left immigrants on their own to sink or swim in our market economy and polarized politics. Getting there requires deep conversations about those that view new immigrants as economic and social complements—driving growth and diversifying our culture—and those who see new immigrants as competitors who will drag down fiscal resources and transform America beyond recognition to those who are already here.

The research lies squarely with those who celebrate immigrant contributions; however, as has become increasingly clear, facts alone do not determine politics and policy. This report lays out the data and, we hope, makes a convincing case that immigrants are not just “takers” and that positive integration is possible. Still, ensuring that California sticks on its more welcoming path will mean tackling the dynamics of racialization and “othering” that have long impacted this area.

Such narrative work is especially important because of a set of complex future trends. The combination of climate and political crises are likely to produce more immigrants who will need support, making all the current arguments about positive fiscal impacts somewhat moot. The state’s reliance on highly-educated immigrants who can be seen as competing for the best jobs could introduce an anti-immigrant reaction from unexpected groups.

The new economic reality involves the coupling of “high-skill” and “low-skill” (at least, low-wage) jobs; we will need to promote economic drivers even as we use public policy and unionization to raise wages at the bottom, a mix not frequently seen in economic development circles. We will have to realize that immigrant integration is not just about work permits, English classes, and naturalization but also about affordable housing, educational quality for immigrants and second-generation youth, and asset-building, as well as social safety net opportunities for aging immigrants.

California has met these challenges before, laying out a set of public infrastructure investments in the 1950s and 1960s that facilitated home ownership, expanded education, and made a modern economy possible. The Achilles heel, we have argued elsewhere, is that many were excluded from the benefits and when the state’s demography changed and more wanted into the California promise, voters reacted by lifting the drawbridges, squeezing fiscal resources to protect incumbent residents, and launching a series of “racial propositions” in the 1990s that rocked the state (HoSang 2010; Pastor 2018).

We are, we hope, past those times. But we also know that a return to that sort of nativism and decline is not impossible and we consider both positive and negative scenarios in the accompanying report. But we do have both a preferred outcome and a sense of what is at stake: if we want all the benefits from immigration pointed to by the literature and this report, we will need to once again commit to the sorts of investments that drove the state forward, this time with a focus on creating a California for all. That is the California challenge across a range of issue areas. Centering racial and social equity as we tackle

immigrant integration, economic development, climate protection, educational quality, arts and culture, and so much more, will be a key task going forward for the Golden State.

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