Understanding California's Demographic Shifts

California Demographic Overview

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California’s population increased by 10% over the past decade to 37.3 million. Overall population growth has slowed from the high-growth decades of the 1970s and 1980s, but growth from 2000 to 2010 still matched the overall US growth rate. California is by far the most populous state and accounts for 12% of total US population.

- Over the past decade, the Hispanic and Asian populations each grew about 30%, while the white, non-Hispanic population declined by 5% and the black population declined by 1%.
- Natural increase (births exceeding deaths) added 3.1 million to the total population from 2000 to 2010.
- International immigration added 1.7 million people, but was largely offset by domestic outmigration of 1.4 million. As a result, net migration totaled only 302,000 for the decade. Net foreign immigration declined 19% from the 1990s level, while net outmigration to other states increased by 15%.
The population mix in California continues to shift, as the white, non-Hispanic population declines and the Hispanic population increases.

- The white, non-Hispanic population peaked at 17.0 million in 1990 and has since declined by 12%, falling to 15.0 million in 2010. In contrast, the Hispanic population increased from 7.7 million in 1990 to 14.0 million in 2010. Since 1990, the Hispanic share of California's total population has increased from 26% to 38%. The white, non-Hispanic share decreased from a majority 57% in 1990 to 47% in 2000 and 40% in 2010.

- Another shift in the population mix occurred as the Asian population grew from 2.7 million in 1990 to 4.8 million in 2010, increasing from 9% of California's total population to 13%.

- In contrast to high growth in the Hispanic and Asian populations, the black population in California increased by just 3% from the 1990 level to 2.2 million in 2010. The black share of California's total population declined from 7% in 1990 to less than 6% in 2010.

California's racial and ethnic mix differs sharply from the nation's overall population—California has larger shares of Hispanics and Asians than the country overall and smaller shares of blacks and white, non-Hispanics.

- California’s population is 38% Hispanic, compared with 16% nationally; the share of white, non-Hispanics is 40%, compared with 64% nationally.

- The share of blacks in California has fallen to 6% of total compared with 12% nationally and the share of Asians has risen to 13%, compared with 5% nationally.
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Age Structure

Although California remains relatively young compared with the rest of the country, over the last decade the population shifted toward the older age brackets, and the median age increased from 33 to 35.

- The two histograms above show how the population has aged. Each histogram is a snapshot of the age structure for that year, with the bars showing total population by five-year age bracket with children (age 0–4) at the bottom and old people (age 85 and older) at the top. Males are on the left and females on the right. The red segments show the Hispanic population in each age bracket.
- One notable change is the upward shift in the whole age structure as the upper age brackets became wider, while the lower brackets remained relatively static.
- Another notable shift is the increase in the Hispanic population. While California's total population increased by 10%, the Hispanic population increased by 28%. The Hispanic share increased from 32% to 38% of total. The Hispanic age structure also shifted upward over the past decade. As the size of the upper age brackets increased, the median age increased from 25 to 27.

The greatest absolute growth occurred in the working-age population, especially in the upper brackets from age 45 to 64. The fastest growth, however, occurred in the population age 65+.

- The chart at the right shows the change in each bracket size over the ten-year period.
- Overall, the working-age population increased by 2.5 million (13%) from 2000 to 2010 and accounted for nearly three-quarters of the total population gain.
- In contrast, the population age 65+ grew at a faster rate, 18%, but added only 650,000, bringing the total population age 65+ to 4.2 million.
- The number of young people, those under 20, grew by only 2% adding just 217,000.

The age mix in California is similar to the country overall, except that California has a slightly smaller share of older people.

- In California the population age 65+ accounts for only 11% of the total population, compared with 13% nationally.
- Relative to the country, California has a slightly larger share of young people, 28% compared with 27%, as well as a slightly larger share of working age people, 61% compared with 60% nationally.
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Age Structure by Race and Ethnicity

California’s age structure differs significantly by race and ethnicity. The Hispanic population is relatively young and its age structure is "pyramid shaped" with a broad base of young people and a relatively narrow top. In contrast, the white, non-Hispanic population is much older and its age structure has a smaller base of young people and a higher concentration of older people. The combination of the youthful Hispanic population and the aging white, non-Hispanic population gives California a relatively even age distribution and makes California younger than the nation.

California’s total population is aging but still growing.

- Median age is 35, up from 33 in 2000.
- Young people age 0 to 19 account for 28% of total population, down from 30% in 2000. The working-age population increased to 61% of total population and the population age 65+ remained at 11%.
- The number of young people increased by 2% over the past decade. Total population increased by 10%.

The white, non-Hispanic population is older and rapidly aging.

- Median age is 45, up from 40 in 2000.
- Just 19% of the population is under age 20, and 18% is age 65+.
- The number of young people declined by 19% over the past decade. Total population declined by 5%.

The black, non-Hispanic population is similar to the state, but aging faster.

- Median age is 35, up from 32 in 2000.
- The age mix is similar to that of the state: 28% of the population is under age 20, and 10% is age 65+.
- The number of young people declined by 17% over the past decade. Total population declined by 1%.

The Asian, non-Hispanic population is older, with a larger concentration in the working ages.

- Median age is 38, up from 34 in 2000.
- The young population accounts for 23% of the total, the working-age population for 65%, and the population age 65+ for 12% of the Asian population.
- The young population grew by 13% from 2000 to 2010. Total population grew by 31%.

The Hispanic population is much younger.

- Median age is just 27, up from 25 in 2000.
- People under 20 make up 38% of the population; only 5% of the population is age 65+.
- The young population grew by 19% over the past decade. Total population grew by 28%.
The Hispanic population in California is significantly younger than the white, non-Hispanic population and has a large share of young people, 38% compared with 19% for the white, non-Hispanic population and 28% for the state overall. Conversely, the white, non-Hispanic population has a higher share of older people, 18% compared with 5% for the Hispanic population and 11% for the state overall. As a result of these divergent age structures, the racial and ethnic composition of the various age groups differs significantly.

- The young population is majority Hispanic: 51% of the state's young population (age 0 to 19) is Hispanic and 28% is white, non-Hispanic. Ten percent is Asian and 6% is black.
- Conversely, the older population is predominantly white, non-Hispanic: of the population age 65+, 62% is white, non-Hispanic and 18% is Hispanic. Thirteen percent is Asian and 5% is black.
The statewide median household income in 2005–09 was $60,392, about 17% higher than the US median income of $51,425. Income varies greatly across racial and ethnic groups, with median household income ranging from $43,397 for black households to $73,570 for Asian households.

- In 2005–09, California households were more heavily concentrated in the higher income brackets than households nationally: 12% of households in California had incomes of $150,000 compared with 8% nationwide.
- California also had proportionally fewer lower-income households: 20% of households in California had income of less than $25,000 compared with 24% nationwide.

The poverty rates in California are similar to nationwide rates, with 13% of individuals and 10% of families living below the federal poverty level.

- For individuals age 65+, the poverty rate in California is 8%, lower than the 10% nationwide rate.

California’s unemployment rate rose steeply from 4.9% in 2006 to 12.4% in 2010. The June 2011 unemployment rate was 12.1%, well above the national rate of 9.3%.

(Note: The most recently released statewide data on household income from the Current Population Survey show that inflation-adjusted median income in California dropped by 5% from 2009 to 2010 and that the share of individuals with income below the federal poverty level increased to 16% and the share of children in poverty increased to 23%. These data provide useful information about statewide trends, but they are not comparable to the five-year ACS data used for the demographic profiles in this series.)
Educational attainment in California varies significantly by race and ethnicity, particularly for high school completion.

One-fifth of adults in California have not completed high school.
- Forty-four percent of Hispanic adults have not completed high school, compared with 14% of Asians and blacks. Just 7% of white, non-Hispanics have not completed high school.
- Although high school completion rates have increased since 2000, California still underperforms relative to the nation. Nationally, only 15% of adults have not completed high school, compared with 20% in California.

Statewide, 30% of adults have Bachelor’s degrees or higher.
- Asians have the highest Bachelor's degree attainment at 48% and Hispanics have the lowest at 10%. Bachelor's degree attainment among black adults is 21% and among white, non-Hispanics it is 38%.
- Bachelor's degree attainment has increased since 2000 in both California and the US—to 30% in California and 28% nationwide.
The share of family households has remained stable since 2000, accounting for 69% of all households, but the mix of family types has shifted.

- Statewide, the traditional family household—a married couple with children—has been on the decline, with the share decreasing from 27% to 23% of total.
- In contrast, family households without children have increased from 33% to 36% of total.

Nonfamily households have increased in number but still represent about 31% of all households, with single-person households still accounting for 23% of total.

- Single person households are most common among blacks and white, non-Hispanics at 30% of households, and least common among Hispanics, at just 11% of households.

Husband-wife households, with or without children, account for almost half of all households.

- The share is highest among Asians, at 59%, and Hispanics, at 54%.

While most individuals age 65+ live with a spouse or other relatives, one quarter live alone, and most of those living alone are women.
More than one quarter of California's population is foreign born.

- Mexico is the most common country of origin, accounting for 44% of the immigrants. Another 11% come from other Latin American countries and 34% come from Asia. Only 7% come from Europe.
- With nearly 10 million immigrants, California accounts for 26% of the nation's foreign-born population, more than any other state.
- International immigration has declined over the last decade. Net international immigration totaled 2.1 million during the 1990s, but fell to 1.7 million from 2000 to 2010.

Across California, 10% of all households are linguistically isolated, meaning that no one in the household age 14 or older can speak English at least “very well.” In addition, 30% of all households speak at least one other language besides English.