CALIFORNIA’S POPULATION

Hans Johnson

► **California is the most populous state in the nation.**

With slightly more than 38 million people (according to 2013 estimates), California is the nation’s most populous state—its population is almost one and a half times that of second-place Texas (26 million). One of every eight U.S. residents lives in California. By 2050, California’s population is projected to reach 50 million people.

► **During the 20th century, California experienced tremendous population growth ...**

In 1900, California was home to less than 2 million people; by 1950 the population had reached 10 million. California’s population nearly tripled in the last half of the 20th century, and its growth rate remained much higher than that of the rest of the United States.

► **... but growth has slowed in recent decades.**

Over the past 20 years, California has experienced its slowest rates of growth ever recorded and an unprecedented migration of residents to other states. From 2000 to 2013, California’s population grew by 13%, which was low for the state and barely higher than the rest of the nation (12%). International migration to California remained strong: the state experienced a net inflow of 2 million. But about 1.7 million more people left California for other states than came to California from other states. Natural increase—more births than deaths—added 3.9 million residents. Overall, California gained 4.2 million residents.

► **California’s population is one of the world’s most diverse.**

No race or ethnic group constitutes a majority of the state’s population. According to the 2012 American Community Survey, 39% of state residents are white, 38% are Latino, 13% Asian, 6% African American, 3% multiracial, and less than 1% American Indian or Pacific Islander. By 2015 Latinos will surpass whites as the state’s single largest ethnic group.

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

According to 2012 estimates, 27% of Californians (10.3 million) are foreign born—a higher proportion than in any other state (New York is second with 23%) and twice the nationwide share (13%). The leading countries of origin for California immigrants are Mexico (4.3 million), the Philippines (834,000), China (775,000), Vietnam (499,000), El Salvador (418,000), India (383,000), and Korea (347,000). In recent years, almost twice as many immigrants have been arriving from Asia as from Latin America.

► **California is aging but is young compared to the rest of the country.**

California’s population is slightly younger than that of the rest of the nation: according to 2012 Census Bureau estimates, the median age in California was 35.5, compared to 37.4 for the entire country. California is the fifth-youngest state (Utah is the youngest). However, California’s population is aging along with the baby boom: by 2030, about one in five Californians will be age 65 or older.

► **California has distinct regions with very different population characteristics.**

California has some of the country’s largest cities—Los Angeles, with a population of 3.9 million, is the second largest. But large swaths of the state are sparsely populated. Fewer than 15,000 people live in Alpine, Mono, and Inyo Counties—an area in the eastern Sierra that covers more than 33,000 square miles (about the size of Indiana). Since the 2010 Census—and for the first time in many decades—the Bay Area has experienced the fastest growth of any region in the state.
California has experienced rapid population growth

![Graph showing population growth in California from 1900 to 2012.](Graph.png)

**Source:** California Department of Finance estimates.

California has become a “minority majority” state

![Bar chart showing changes in racial and ethnic makeup of California's population from 1970 to 2012.](Chart.png)

**Sources:** California Department of Finance 1970–2000; American Community Survey 2012.

**Sources:** California Department of Finance estimates and projections; U.S. Census Bureau estimates; Decennial censuses; American Community Survey.

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