

THE FUTURE OF IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

A CALIFORNIA 100
REPORT ON POLICIES
AND FUTURE SCENARIOS



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.

CALIFORNIA 100 RESEARCH TEAM

Henry E. Brady, Ph.D., Director of Research
Lindsay Maple, M.P.P., Senior Research Analyst
Ava Calanog, M.P.P., Assistant Director of Research

THE CALIFORNIA 100 EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM

Allison Berke, Ph.D., Director of Advanced Technology
Henry E. Brady, Ph.D., Director of Research
Amy Lerman, Ph.D., Director of Innovation
Jesse Melgar, M.P.P., Director of Engagement
Karthick Ramakrishnan, Ph.D., Executive Director

READ MORE ABOUT THE FUTURE OF IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION IN CALIFORNIA

For additional background information, read the related Facts-Origins-Trends report at [California100.org](https://california100.org). The Facts-Origins-Trends report contains all of the references and citations to support the content of this report.

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This Report is one of 15 reports that will be released in 2022 as part of the California 100 Initiative. We are proud to partner with the following research centers and institutes across California on our work:

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For the last 15 years, the USC Equity Research Institute (ERI) has produced data-driven analyses and rigorous research to inform movements and policies on issues related to immigrant integration and racial justice; inclusive economies and climate equity; and social movements and governing power. In addition, ERI leads convenings and communications to deepen and broaden our reach to key audiences; engage in strategic collaborations that leverage our strengths for broader impact; and model an effective, sustainable, and racially-just research center. Throughout ERI's work on immigrant integration, we promote narratives to support the integration of diverse immigrant and U.S.-born communities; lift up the intersection of racial justice and immigrant rights; and strengthen the base for intersectoral collaborations.

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.

THE FUTURE OF IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION REPORT AUTHORS:

Thai V. Le Turpanjian Postdoctoral Fellow in Civil Society
and Social Change, USC Equity Research Institute

Manuel Pastor Director, USC Equity Research Institute

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FOREWORD

“As California Goes, So Goes the Nation, Alas.” That was a headline from a *Los Angeles Times* opinion column on April 30, 1989, which noted that, even though “Californians have long considered their state the cutting edge of social and political change... [it] no longer seems the vanguard of political innovation. Other states rarely look to California for policy initiatives.”

Fast-forward to 2022, and few would proclaim that California lacks in policy innovation. Quite the contrary. The state has enacted a variety of policies ranging from expansions in immigrant rights and voting rights to health care and higher education, and from large-scale experiments in guaranteed income to ambitious moves towards net-zero emissions in a variety of sectors. And despite the periodic waves of “doom and gloom” reporting about the state, California’s economic output over the last 25 years has grown faster than the national average, and on par with GDP growth for the state of Texas.

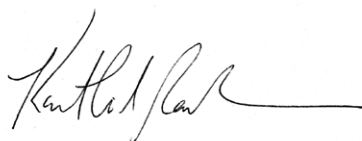
Even so, much remains to be done. The California Dream has always been marred by a high degree of racial exclusion, and it remains out of reach for millions in the state—whether measured by health outcomes, unaffordable housing, or massive disparities in income and wealth. California also recognizes that future progress depends on recognizing and correcting historical wrongs. Its Truth and Healing Council, for example, will provide recommendations aimed at prevention, restoration, and reparation involving California Native Americans and the State. If California’s racial diversity represents America’s demographic reality by 2100, our work is essential—not only for the long-term success of the state, but also for our country’s innovative and equitable future.

This future-focused work is especially pressing today. The COVID-19 pandemic has scrambled a state and nation already undergoing significant changes in economics, politics, and society. The harmful consequences of climate change are at our doorstep,

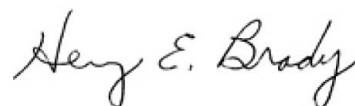
with forest fires and droughts that grow in frequency and intensity each year. The weakening of local media and the growth of disinformation threaten both our civic health and our public health. And staggering inequities in income and wealth, home-ownership and health, threaten the state's reputation as a haven for migrants, domestic and international alike.

In addition to immediate threats that affect our long-term future, we also see plenty of opportunity. Record increases in federal and state spending mean that billions of additional dollars are flowing to state, local, and tribal governments in California. Many jurisdictions are looking to invest in infrastructure that meets the long-term needs of their communities. Philanthropic institutions and individual donors are also looking to make transformative investments that have enduring impact. We have an opportunity to inform and enrich all of these plans and conversations.

Most institutions and organizations in California are focused on immediate challenges, and don't have the luxury of time, dedicated talent, and resources to focus on long-term futures. California 100 is grateful for the opportunity to provide added value at this critical time, with actionable research, demonstration projects, and compelling scenarios that help Californians—government agencies, stakeholder groups, and residents alike—to envision, strategize, and act collectively to build a more innovative and equitable future.



Karthick Ramakrishnan, Ph.D.
Executive Director



Henry E. Brady, Ph.D.
Director of Research



IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION AND THE FUTURE OF THE GOLDEN STATE

California is often thought of as an immigrant-rich state. There is good reason for that portrayal: over one-quarter of the state's population is foreign-born; one-third of the workforce is immigrant; and nearly half of California's children have at least one immigrant parent. Yet California's 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.



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That Californians still think of California as an immigrant state reflects the massive demographic shifts and the political reactions to them that occurred in earlier periods. For example, in the 1970s and 1980s, 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. But that political explosion has largely passed and California now has the most settled immigrant population in the nation, as measured by years spent in the U.S. This reality of a settled immigrant population in California extends to the undocumented population, two-thirds of whom have been in the U.S. for more than a decade.

Because of this shift in the population—fewer inflows from abroad, more children being born to immigrants, and the more settled nature of the foreign-born—the important tasks in the decades ahead center on encouraging the successful integration of immigrants and ensuring that there will be enough future immigration to continue fueling California's prosperity. The integration of immigrants 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 the state's children as well.

The demographic imperative for immigrant integration comes from the other side of the age spectrum as well: the share of the state's population that is 65 or older will rise from around 15 percent today to nearly 27 percent by 2060. With Californians aging, demand in the "caring" sector that often employs women of color and immigrants will only grow, 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 immigration to address California's labor shortage—and this means the state will have to learn to compete for immigrants, rather than assuming they will come.

Indeed, the dynamism of California's economy is, in no small part, due to immigrant workers and entrepreneurs. The state's 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 California’s future.

Also, when thinking about talent, it is important to stress that it is not just high-wage and high-skilled workers who need to be lured to the Golden State. Rather, modern economies need various skill levels to flourish. 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, which 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 general, immigration is crucial to economic growth. Immigrants help fill in parts of the labor market even as they provide a cushion for U.S.-born workers during downturns. Yet, less-skilled newcomers may 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. Finally, 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 fiscal 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 for the state 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 public policy research, 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.” 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.

In this report, we look at the state of immigrant integration in California and offer some insight on future scenarios. We integrate historical narratives, data analytics, and case studies to answer the following questions: How are immigrants in California doing, and what are the challenges they face? How does California treat immigrants? What steps has California taken to attract immigrants to provide opportunities for entrepreneurship and economic mobility? 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?



SHIFTING THE HISTORICAL FOCUS FROM ASSIMILATION TO INTEGRATION

From its very founding, immigration has made California prosperous and strong. It has also generated considerable controversy and legally-sanctioned racial discrimination, from state restrictions on Chinese immigrants in the late 1880s and so-called Alien Land Laws in the early 1900s, to mass deportations of Mexican immigrants in the 1930s, Japanese internment in the 1940s, and laws from the 1970s to 1990s targeting undocumented immigrants, primarily from Mexico. Even as California has taken the national lead on immigrant integration over the last two decades, concerns about immigration remain strong, reflecting a more general tension in American history and society with respect to immigrant contributions and immigrant assimilation.

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 progress among immigrants and their U.S.-born children. But it is also the case that the mythos of immigrant success is often used to signal that anything is possible, obscuring the persistent pattern of racism that has held back Black, Native, and many Latino Americans, and that has colored the reception and experience of non-European immigrants in recent decades.



Both immigration scholars and the broader public have historically talked about immigrants through a lens of assimilation. The traditional views of assimilation, which assumed that immigrants would, over generations, shed their language and specific cultures and enter the American mainstream, were mainly based on the flows of Europeans to the United States in the 1880s to 1920s. These traditional views have been challenged by a recognition that immigrant integration is a two-way street.

America shapes the immigrant experience, but immigrants also 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.

Immigrant integration is neither automatic nor easy, especially given the diversity of immigrants coming to America since 1965. 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.¹ But declaring that race mattered less in who came in did not mean that race mattered much less in how immi-

grants were treated. Importantly, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act also placed restrictions on legal immigration from Mexico and Latin America for the first time, creating a problem of undocumented immigration that had significant racial undertones and harmful effects on the U.S.-born children of immigrants with uncertain legal status.

More generally, research has shown evidence of “segmented assimilation” in which different groups experience different opportunities and context of reception because of their race and ethnicity. Specifically, those groups of immigrants and their offspring that faced negative racial stereotypes were more likely to face downward mobility over time instead of the upward mobility heralded in the “American Dream” version of immigration. Partly because of the debates about who is transforming who and to what—as well as an increasing understanding of the role of racism and racist nativism 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.”

THREE MEASURES OF IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

In prior work by the authors, we have suggested that immigrant integration be defined by im-

¹ 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



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

There are several advantages to defining immigrant integration this way. The first is that all three dimensions—economic mobility, civic participation, and warmth of welcome—are measurable, providing an objective baseline to capture California's current state as well as 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 contexts of social, economic, and policy reception and the evolution of policy matters. Finally, in an era where diversity is generally considered a positive trait, the language of integration allows each new American to find their way into a constantly shifting mainstream. It is a frame that can insist on the importance of learning English

to boost economic prospects without demanding that another language be forgotten or dismissed.

At the same, we stress that the language of integration should not be used to sidestep the cultural conflicts that can lead to waves of xenophobia and resistance to immigrant progress. These racialized politics—and whether immigrants and their allies develop their own political push-back—help determine the contours of governmental policy responses. Any frank discussion of the future needs to tackle the underlying issues about racism, nativism, and mobilized fears of demographic change that often make common sense ideas, like immigration reform, uncommonly hard to enact.

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 era include the degree of linguistic isolation and the extent of digital access. Finally, in a state that hosts more than 2.4 million undocumented resi-

dents,² or nearly one-quarter of the nation's total, we must also consider the degree of involvement in and state of community organizations, social movements, and other vehicles for ensuring that immigrant voices find their way into public decision-making.

Our third dimension, **warmth of welcome** refers both to the attitudes of incumbent residents and the supportive or non-supportive character of government policies. Measuring warmth of welcome can be, to a certain extent, more inexact, with qualitative changes, like enacting new policies, opening resources to undocumented Californians, or shifts in rhetoric and tone standing in for “harder” quantitative 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.

² Of the undocumented immigrant population in California, we estimate approximately 61,500 are Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders and slightly more than 175,000 are Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients.

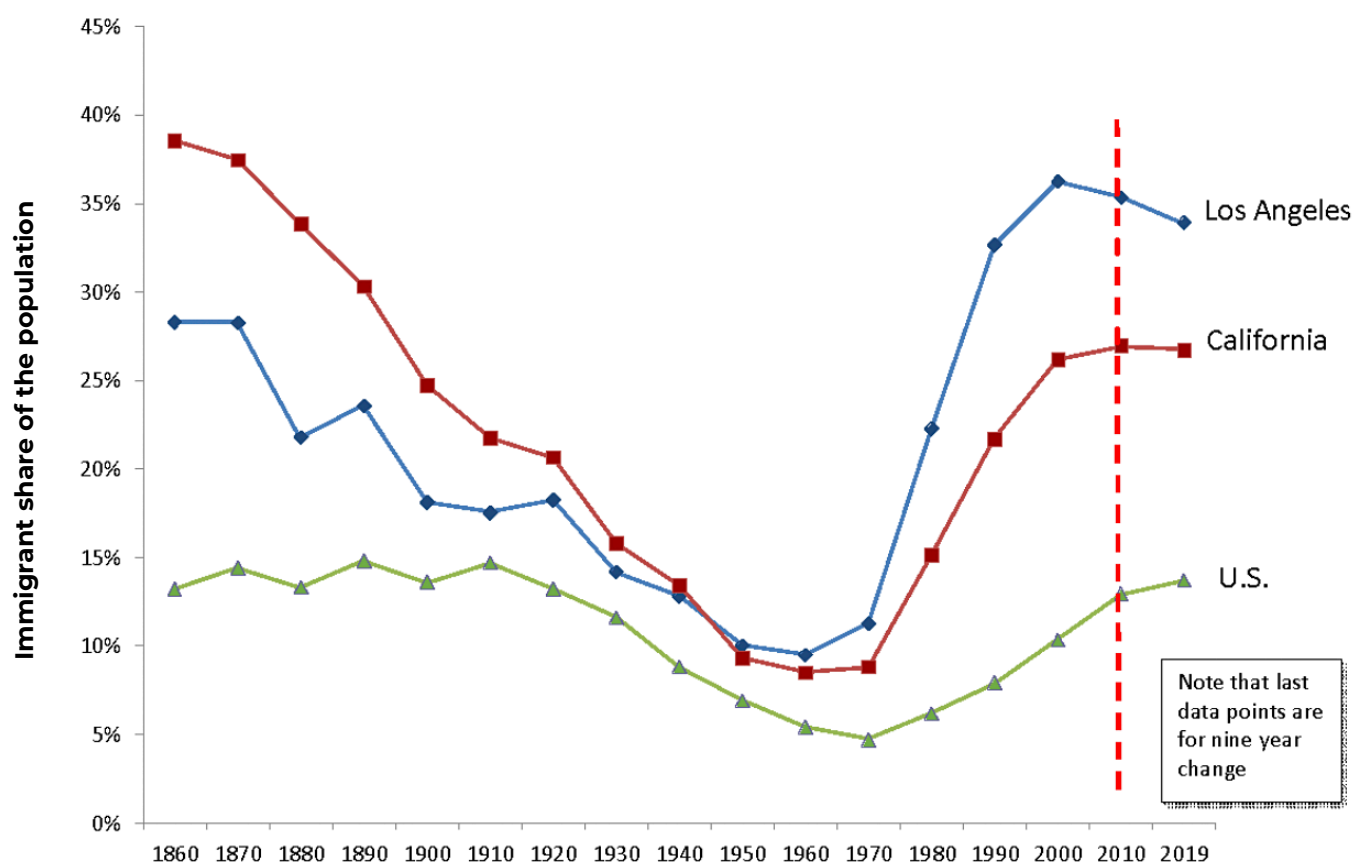
WHO ARE CALIFORNIA'S IMMIGRANTS?

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 19th century and then again at the end of the 20th century. One explanation for this initial high presence is that the state had been Mexican territory at its incorporation; however, an even more compelling factor was the influx of foreigners from Europe and Asia

Figure 1

Immigrant Share of Population, CA, 1860 to 2019



SOURCE: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of United States, 1850-2019 data from IPUMS SDA.



who were eager to join an economy booming with opportunities through the latter part of the 19th 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.³

California's restrictions on immigrant rights and Chinese immigration began a few decades after its founding. Even though the state benefited significantly from immigrant workers in mining and railroad construction, the state enacted various legal and constitu-

tional restrictions on Chinese residents in the 1870s. California's congressional delegation also pushed the federal government to end Chinese immigration in 1882 and, after a series of arson and mob attacks on Chinese immigrant settlements, the Chinese immigrant population declined by more than one half from 1880 to 1910.

Like the rest of the nation, 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

³ 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).

of would-be Americans. However, the share of immigrants in California had been declining dramatically even prior to that. In addition to restrictions on Chinese immigration, 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" (i.e., 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 late 19th and early 20th 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 20th 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. In addition to promoting hostility towards Chinese immigration in the late 1880s, the state also enacted so-called Alien Land Laws in the early 20th century, effectively preventing Asian immigrants from owning agricultural, residential, and commercial property in the state. 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. 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 that was proposed by Governor Pete Wilson. 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. With Proposition 187, Governor Wilson tapped into deep concerns held by some constituents about an unprecedented flow of foreign-born migrants to the state.



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). 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 have termed the "California package:" a set of policies that pro-

vide 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 California's often welcoming policies, the state now faces a different shock: We are in danger of losing the dynamism immigrants bring. California's 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 percent having been in the U.S. for a decade or longer. 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.

Long-term settlement has also contributed to the changing geography of immigration. For example, the "spatial assimilation" models

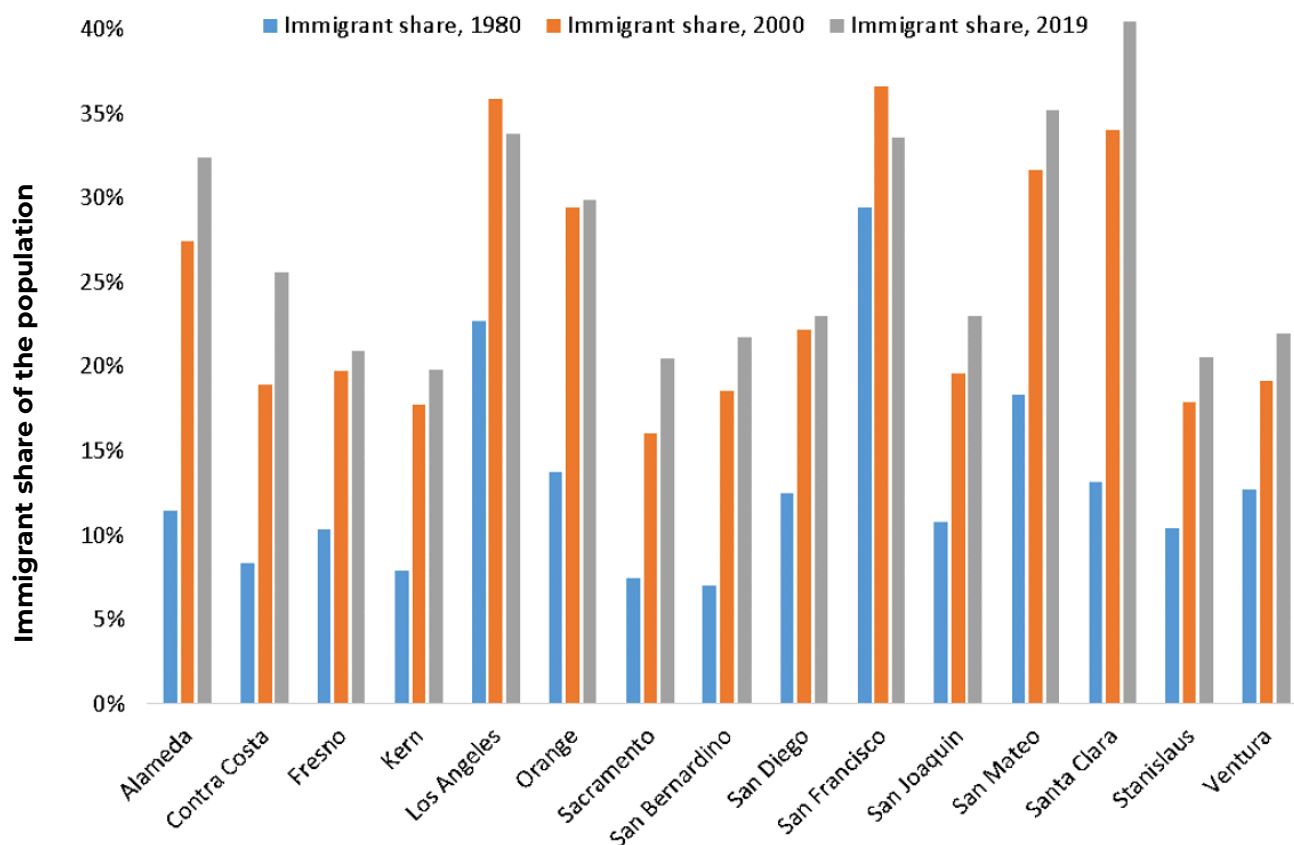
of the past tended to predict a split between city and suburb, in which immigrants would radiate outward from the cities over time in keeping with their economic success, have a desire for homeownership, and adopt American culture. Yet, we are on the cutting edge of a new geography where some suburbs are direct entry points for immigrant arrivals and where some 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.”

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

Figure 2

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.

the share of their foreign-born population (see Figure 2). 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 destina-

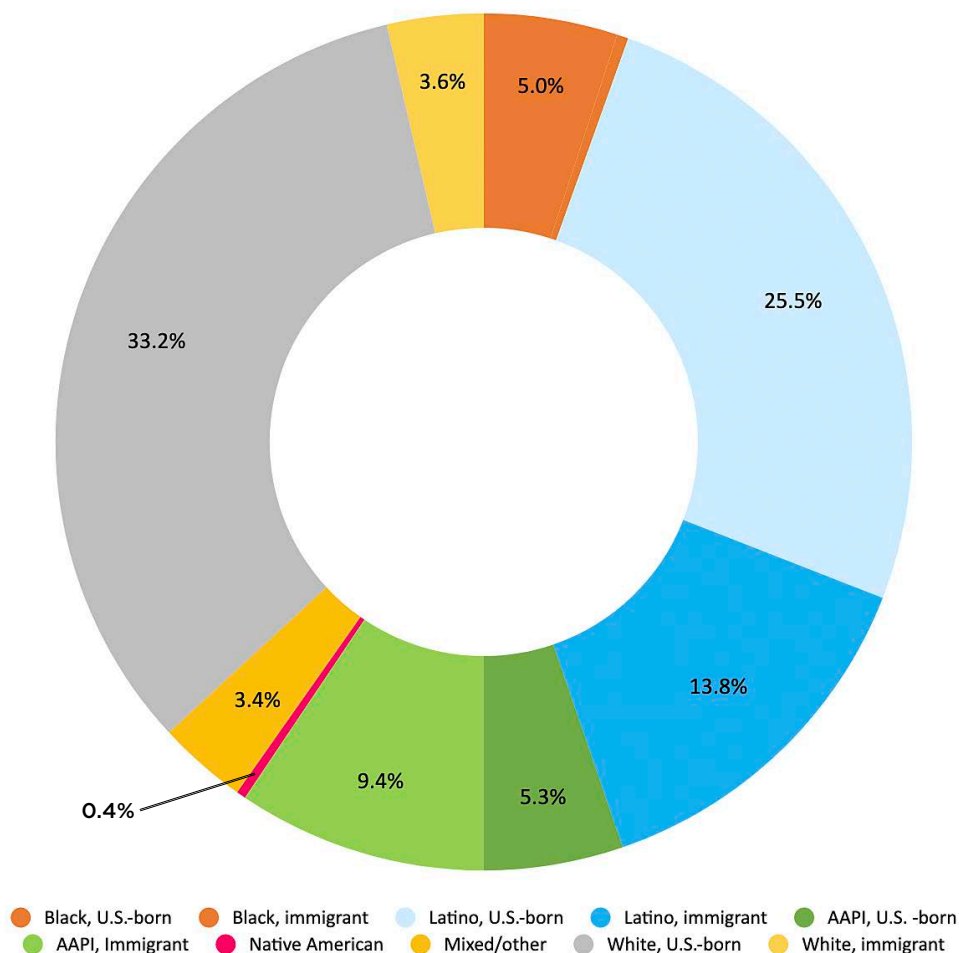
tions, such as the Central Valley and the Inland Empire are experiencing rises from what was a very small base in 1980. Both service delivery and community organizing infrastructure to assist immigrant integration has often been more focused on our bigger urban areas on the coast, and yet the new geography calls for greater institutional and civic investments in inland and suburban California.

HOW WELL HAS CALIFORNIA INTEGRATED ITS IMMIGRANTS?

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. 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.

While there has long been a sense that California's immigrants primarily 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. It is therefore not surprising how racially and ethnically diverse the state's immigrant population has become over the last century. As Figure 3 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 who 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.

Figure 3
Population by Race/Ethnicity and Nativity, CA, 2019


SOURCE: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of United States, 1850-2019 data from IPUMS SDA.

Although 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. One indicator of that: the

state's 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, implying that barriers based on legal or lawful status are of widespread importance.



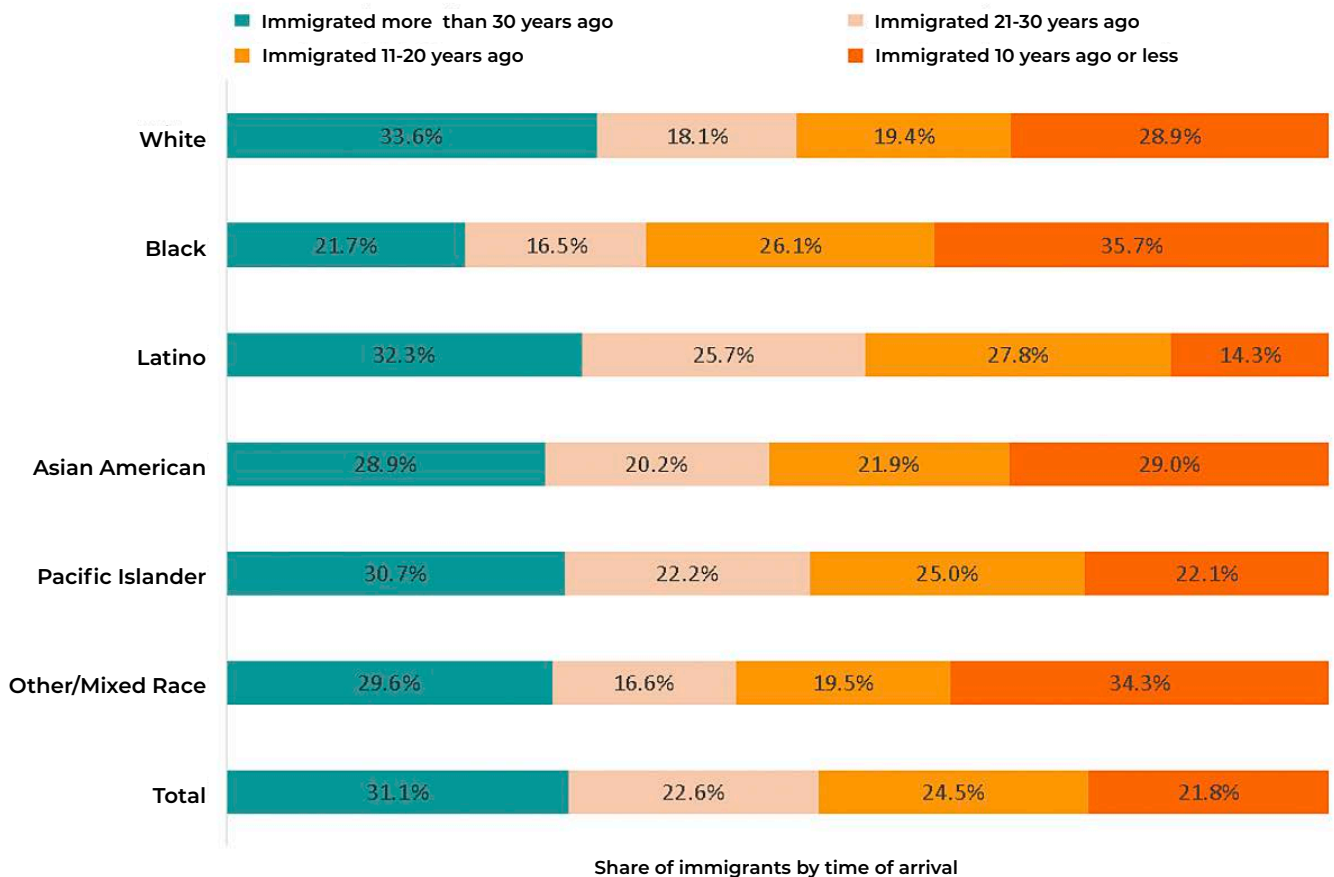
Approximately 12.5 percent of Latinos in California are undocumented, making them the most likely racial/ethnic group to not have lawful status. This is followed by 6.2 percent of Asian Americans in the state. Overall, more than 80 percent of undocumented immi-

grants in the state are Latino, whereas Asian Americans make up 14.6 percent.

When looking at immigrants' recency of arrival by race/ethnicity (Figure 4), Latino immigrants are the most likely in California to have lived

Figure 4

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.

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.

Immigrant growth in the state has slowed, and the share of the state's foreign-born population has been on the decline for several years. It has been shrinking for much longer in several of the state's traditional receiving areas, such as Los Angeles and San Francisco. It seems that fewer immigrants are moving to California, and more immigrants are selecting a different destination upon their arrival. Concerns persist about not receiving our share of new immigrants, and there are reasons to believe that move-out may tick up.

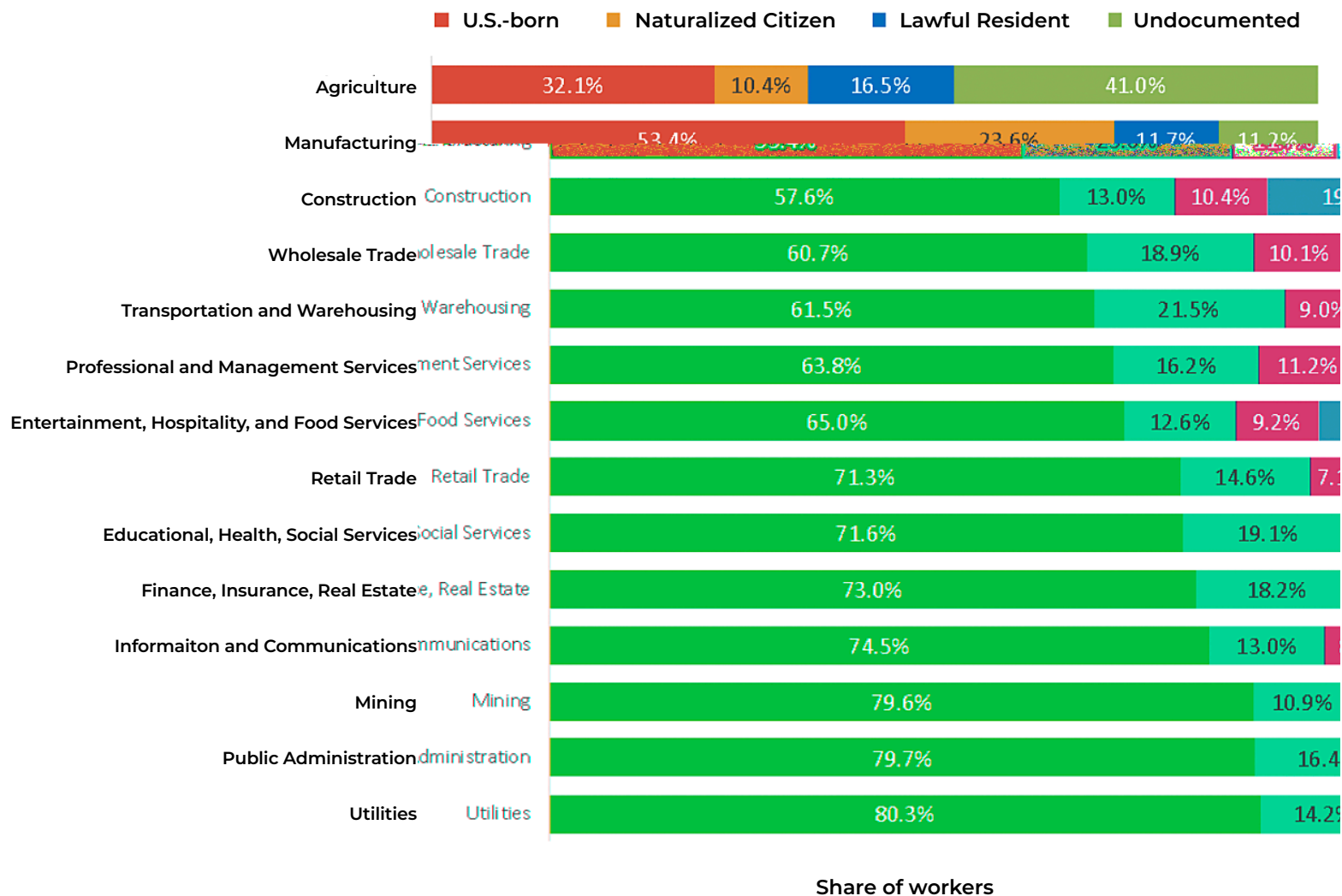
THE ECONOMIC MOBILITY OF CALIFORNIA'S IMMIGRANTS

With regard to the task of actually measuring immigrant integration, our first dimension, economic mobility, refers to the progress of immigrants over time. 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. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic made clear, immigrants and communities of color face disproportionate economic barriers, making it more difficult to integrate economically and recover from the pandemic itself.

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.

It is also important to stress change over time. After all, immigrants often arrive and find themselves underpaid for several reasons, including a lack of education, being undervalued for the education they do have (notably if a foreign institution granted their degree), and facing issues associated with immigra-

Figure 5
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.



tion 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 hard to measure and often gets approximated, it is crucial to keep in mind the notion of their forward movement.

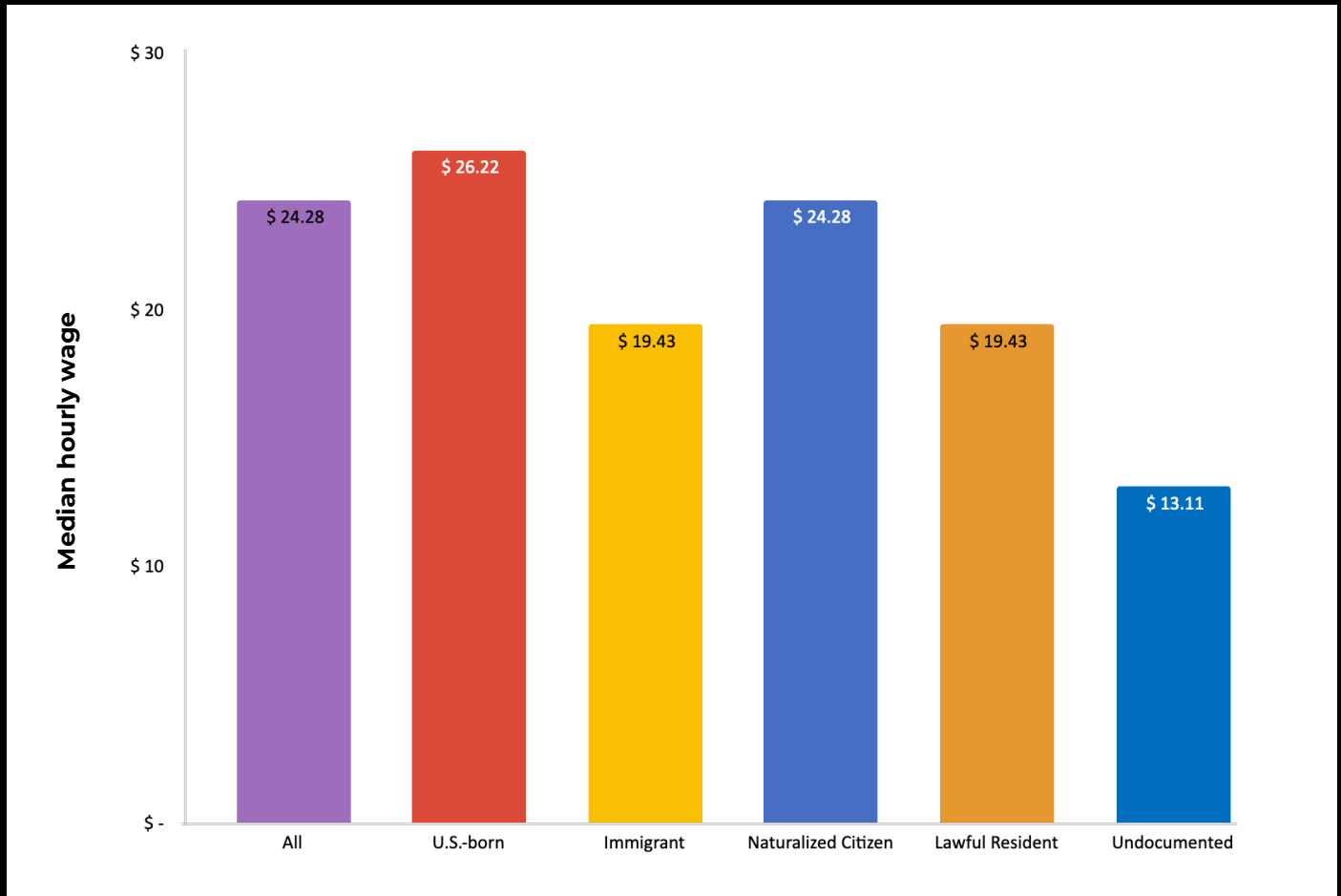
Composing one-third of the workforce, immigrants are an essential part of California's economy. They are an especially important part of agriculture, construction, and manufacturing, often occupying the lowest paying rungs on those labor ladders (see Figure 5). Immigrants also make up about a third of health care practitioners and over 40 percent of health care support. By race/ethnicity, immigrants are more likely than their racial/ethnic U.S.-born counterparts to be self-employed. While some of this reflects exclusion from formal employ-

ment because of immigration status or a lack of credential recognition, it also demonstrates an embrace of an entrepreneurial spirit. If adequately supported, immigrant-owned small businesses could contribute significantly to the state's local economies.

Although some immigrant workers enjoy status and income, immigrant wages are generally lower than for the U.S.-born, even after disaggregating by race and gender. Even if employed in a full-time job, immigrants are still more likely to fall into poverty and significantly more likely to have a household income below 200% of the poverty line. 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.

Figure 6

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.

Broad categories also mask significant disaggregated differences. For example, the median income for households headed by Indian immigrants is about three times that of Hmong immigrants. Considerable educational distinctions within Asian and other

immigrant groups persist as well. The median household income for immigrants tends to grow with the length of residence in the country, reflecting the upward mobility pattern many aspire to achieve. In general, the more time immigrants have been in the



country, the less likely they are to be living in poverty. With time in the U.S., homeownership also rises dramatically for immigrants, regardless of status. This reflects the usual process of aging into ownership. Still, the pattern persists even when disaggregated by age, suggesting a genuine desire to build a life in California.

To highlight the role of education in an immigrant's economic integration, we can look at how wage varies by status and educational attainment. The data shows that compared to immigrants with the same immigration 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, 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 with the same education level.

Lawful residents with a bachelor's degree or higher (\$40.31) see a more significant 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 distinction is important 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.

Disparities in educational attainment also explain a significant portion of the wage divergence between U.S.-born and immigrant workers with 56.2 percent of undocumented immigrants with less than a high school degree in 2019, 29.9 percent of lawful residents and 18.9 percent of naturalized citizens—still far short of only 7.3 percent for U.S.-born. These low levels of educational attainment raise questions about promoting adult education and facilitating the “credentialing” of degrees earned in other countries. Education efforts should be aimed at both the children and their parents.

As previous research suggests, gendered 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. While U.S.-born men had median wages of \$28.17 in 2019 and U.S.-born women \$24.28, immigrant men had wages of \$20.20 and immigrant women \$19.09. 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’s 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.

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 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. In the pandemic context, federal and state guidelines defined “Essential” as “must-open” enterprises, including health care, agriculture, logistics, and grocery stores. “High-risk” was measured as having to work in close proximity to others and thus increasing potential exposure.

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 their high poverty rate. 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. In addition to a general mistrust and fear of interacting with government agencies, undocumented immigrants have been limited in their eligibility for certain federal and state public benefits.

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. 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. House-

hold 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).

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 canvass-

ing and phone banking, noncitizens and undocumented immigrants have helped shape and mobilize the political landscape of California, despite their inability to vote. Finally, in a state that hosts more than 2.4 million undocumented residents, nearly a quarter of the nation's total, one must also consider the degree of involvement in any form of community organizations, social movements, and other vehicles to ensure that their voices also find their way into public decision-making.

LINGUISTIC ISOLATION

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 crucial piece of civic engagement that some immigrant-serving organizations are working to bridge. Only 1.1 percent of U.S.-born residents in California

are linguistically isolated but 25.6 percent of immigrants are—with 21.3 percent of naturalized citizens, 26.8 percent of lawful residents, and 38 percent of undocumented. Linguistic isolation has a distinct regional pattern with the highest levels in the Central Valley, Monterey, and Los Angeles Counties. Of particular note are high levels of language isolation for Latino immigrants in the rural areas of California, where immigrant services are scarce. This feature complicates outreach and support during crises, including wildfires in rural northern California.

A deeper dive into each of these regions' linguistically-isolated households reveal somewhat similar trends. 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.

NATURALIZATION, DIGITAL DISCONNECTION, AND MORE

Naturalization is crucial because it yields economic benefits such as increased wages and better employment opportunities as well as enhanced security and more significant opportunities for civic participation. There are approximately 2.2 million Californians who meet all the naturalization requirements but have not 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 fear that filling out naturalization forms and contact with immigration officials might expose undocumented family members. The state could help matters by launching a targeted campaign for citizenship.

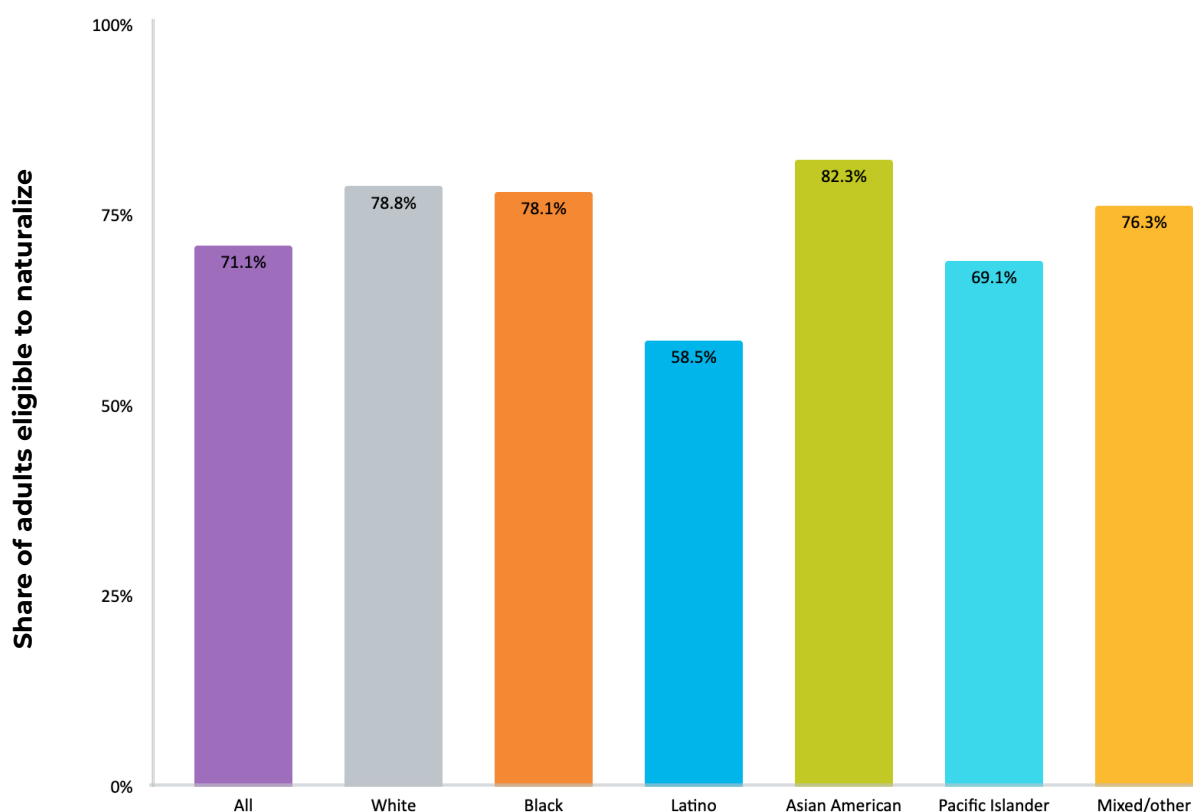
To determine the rate of naturalization, we divide the number of adult immigrants who

have naturalized by the total number of people who were able to naturalize (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. For example, among the eligible adult population in California, as shown in Figure 7, 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.

Figure 7

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 current 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. This is not surprising as Latinos have the lowest rate of naturalization. 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.

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.

Finally, with gaps in support from the state and local governments, community-based organizations have stepped in to provide services and a vehicle for voicing concerns. This vibrant organizing and representation of the immigrant community are important reasons immigrant concerns have been considered in

formulating policy, such as expanding health care and pandemic relief. If state leaders want to encourage immigrant integration and a free flow of information about immigrant concerns,

supporting such community-based organizations with both state and philanthropic dollars could be an important driver in advancing fair and equitable civic engagement.

CALIFORNIA'S WARMTH OF WELCOME FOR IMMIGRANTS

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.

To a certain extent, measuring this can be 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 areas where understanding regional variation is critical.

CALIFORNIA'S HISTORICAL WARMTH OF WELCOME APPROACH

The Golden State now enjoys a reputation of being one of the most immigrant-friendly and progressive places in the United States. Still, the path to California's welcoming treatment of immigrants was not forged easily or without intense resistance. Immigration to the United States was controlled to meet certain demands, including labor shortages and public opinion. Anti-immigrant sentiment and discriminatory rhetoric against certain groups have led to migration restrictions from entire countries and regions. An early and important example of such restrictions is the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, 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.

With restrictions on immigration from China, California—like the rest of the U.S.—turned to its southern neighbors as a source of cheap labor. Immigration from Latin America grew,



but so did the anti-immigrant sentiment towards Latino immigrants. 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. Like much of immigrant labor in California's past, Braceros were treated only as cheap labor, not deserving of rights. 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 centered on the "Latino threat."

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.

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, 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 blamed immigrants for straining public finances, putting demands on social services, and reducing the number of jobs offering livable wages.

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. 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. However, due to this lingering fear, many undocumented immigrants in California still refrained from accessing public benefits and services due to the enforcement threats embedded in policies like Proposition 187.

The passage of Proposition 187 galvanized grassroots organizing and Latino voters to work 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. Through this period and the next decade, with a wave of pro-immigrant supporters, grassroots organizing and 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.

CALIFORNIA’S MODERN APPROACH TO WELCOMING IMMIGRANTS

California’s push for pro-immigrant policies in recent decades has begun to address its past anti-immigrant history. 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 places 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.

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. Nearly 52 percent of hate crimes reported in 2019 were motivated by bias toward the victim’s race/ethnicity or ancestry. However, the number of anti-Black and anti-Latino bias events fell by 12 and 26.2 percent, respectively. These trends differ significantly from reported hate incidents and crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic; one year later, hate crime events had increased 31

percent, and events motivated by racial bias had increased 67.3 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.

Of importance, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, anti-Asian discrimination and hate crime across the country have grown 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. 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 July 2021, California allocated \$156 million toward alternatives to combat increasing anti-Asian violence and hate, including support for victims in what was deemed a historic investment. 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 investment in 2021 dedicated to combating anti-Asian violence.

HOUSING FOR IMMIGRANTS IN CALIFORNIA

In shaping the warmth of welcome and immigrants' ability to stay in California, we need to also consider the housing opportunities 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. For

example, 1.5 percent of households headed by U.S.-born Californians live in overcrowded housing, whereas 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.

In California's more costly regions, overcrowding is more likely to occur, with immigrants seeing greater rates than U.S.-born Californians. 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 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 residents with safe and affordable housing through voucher systems and subsidized housing. However, federal policies (e.g., public charge rule, which gave immigrant officials

agency to deny noncitizen immigrants entry into the U.S. or to obtain lawful permanent based on immigrants' likeliness to be a public charge as measured by their potential reliance on public resources and benefits for extended periods of time) can deter access to such resources, thus forcing immigrants into overcrowded housing because of cost and availability. While federal action is important, unless California is able to make housing more abundant and affordable, it will likely continue to lose market share to other states as a primary and secondary destination for immigrants.





LAWS MEANT TO PROTECT CALIFORNIA'S IMMIGRANTS

In 2015, California passed SB 600, which added “citizenship or immigration status” to the protected classes under the Unruh Civil Rights Act. This extended the anti-discrimination protections under the Act to immigrants of all statuses. Specifically, 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 regarding protection from hate crimes.

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 regarding their access to public benefits—a stark contrast to its past adoption of policies like Proposition 187. This includes the state’s expansion of Medi-Cal to ensure more immigrants access health insurance and health-care. 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. In 2021, California passed a bill that would further expand

access to Medi-Cal to low-income undocumented adults 50 years and older effective May 2022.

In 2017, California enacted AB 291, also referred to as the Immigrant Tenant Protection Act, which protects immigrant renters from landlord harassment. 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 with 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 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. A maximum of only \$1,000 in assistance is allowed per household and is only available for up to 150,000 undocumented immigrant adults. While this represented progress, we

estimate that there are nearly 2.3 million undocumented immigrant adults in California, suggesting the extent of unmet needs.

SERVICES FOR IMMIGRANTS IN CALIFORNIA

Accessibility of services is another dimension of 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. 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.

The lack of resources and services is worth noting because immigrant communities may disproportionately rely on informal networks and organizations that do not have the capacity, oversight, or structure to serve the region's immigrant population effectively. 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. Many immigration attorneys and legal practitioners agree that the “legal advice” given to immigrants by “*notarios*” is often inaccurate, insufficient, or wholly wrong resulting in 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 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.

CALIFORNIA’S RELATIONSHIP WITH FEDERAL IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT

Before 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 the Border Patrol’s capacity and deploy greater enforcement resources throughout the border region. The Border Patrol drastically increased its capacity to surveil the San Diego/Tijuana region, and its presence in the interior throughout Southern

California dramatically grew after creating the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). This increased presence resulted in more enforcement and fear among immigrant communities. A 1993 state law passed by Republican Governor Pete Wilson expanded such enforcement by mandating state prisons’ cooperation with federal immigration authorities.

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), prohibiting local and municipal jails from detaining immigrants held for low-level, non-violent offenses for deportation purposes. 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 law enforcement agencies to provide individuals in custody the right to decline interviews with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and to provide annual public reports of all instances where local law enforcement provides ICE access to individuals in their custody.



In 2017, California became a so-called “sanctuary state” through Senate Bill 54, also known as the California Values Act. This enactment prohibited local law enforcement agencies from asking about immigration status or 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. Still, some localities 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. According to the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) at Syracuse University, nearly 69,000 deportation cases were 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 represented legally, highlighting the critical importance of ensuring access to immigration legal services throughout California.

Under the Trump administration, federal immigration agencies stepped up their enforcement in California. After the passage of the California Values Act (SB 54), ICE Acting Director Thomas Homan issued a stark statement opposing the bill’s protection of undocumented immigrants. 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. During this time, the Trump administration bolstered its anti-immigrant policy agenda and negative 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, full compliance with the state sanctuary laws varies across the state.

Californians generally hold favorable views towards immigrants and policies intended to help with their integration. 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. 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 favor

such a policy, only 20 percent of Republicans and 57 percent of Independents agree.

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, creating a more welcoming environment for immigrants. Some researchers 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." Beyond the two major immigration policy issues of citizenship and healthcare coverage, Californians have more welcoming views towards immigrants than the rest of the country. These attitudes were reflected in the state's effort to include undocumented Californians in relief and outreach actions taken during the COVID-19 crisis.

TRENDS FOR THE FUTURE OF IMMIGRANTS IN CALIFORNIA

What are the important trends that are affecting immigrant integration in California today and will likely affect the future scenarios for the state? There are several and they cut in very different directions. Below, we consider the changing composition of immigrant flows, the aging of California's 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. 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. 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. 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 to enlist Asian Americans, partly because of their adherence to “traditional values” and the anti-communist leanings of certain refugee groups. However, anti-immigrant politics in the last two decades have pushed Asian Americans predominantly towards the Democratic Party. In any case, the era of thinking of immigration as mostly a Latino issue will need to change.

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 rapid 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 by 2060, 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.⁴

⁴ 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.

This has given rise to discussions of how best to support the “care economy.” 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. 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 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 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.

Of course, Latino and Asian communities are not just composed of immigrants—and there are white and Black immigrants, too—so this is an imperfect measure of our coming challenges. However, the aging of immigrants in California 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. 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 in the region, then to Mexico, and eventually the U.S. This change in climate 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 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.

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 facing increased inequality 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. The interdependence of those of high and low skill level is one reason why focusing on just attracting well-educated immigrants can be an inadequate response to California's need for labor. Other parts of the country, which have focused on already educated immigrants for economic growth, are now discovering to their detriment that they are short of less-skilled workers.

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.

Multi-generational progress requires that immigrant families have economic and residential stability provided by rapidly expanding the supply of classes teaching English as a second language, offering community college opportunities, and extending workforce development efforts, as well as continuing to move the minimum wage upward over time. In addition, California must address the housing unaffordability crisis in the state.

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.



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 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.

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 Washington, 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. These changes may take place slower than expected, given the supermajority rules of the U.S. Senate rather than the majoritarian rules of state legislative reform in California. Still, 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.

As we suggested when considering “warmth of welcome,” California voters are especially sympathetic: in polls from 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. This shift in public opinion 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 rise in order to pursue something different—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 neces-

sarily 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, 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 the federal government must become involved in immigration reform, 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 benefit of supporting GOP candidates and this will shift attention to political struggles between moderates and progressives in the Democratic Party. This could cement pro-immigrant politics or it could exacerbate the potential breaks from immigrant interests highlighted above.

COMPETITION FOR IMMIGRANTS

As we have noted, California has long thought of itself as an immigrant-rich state. It has not thought it needed to do much to attract immigrants: build the Golden State and they will come. But the last American Communities Survey (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 California attracted in the 1970s and 1980s. Previous politics and policies in Cali-



California have either assumed that little needed to be done to attract immigrants or they have actively sought to dissuade arrival. It will be a fundamental shift in mindset for California to think about policies to attract immigrants.

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. Reducing inequality and increasing warmth of welcome will require significant policy attention across a wide range of issues, such as housing, transportation, education, and jobs, and not just considerations regarding enforcement of immigration laws and shielding from federal overreach.

To do this successfully, there will have to be a change in immigration policy. In the past, 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, but that focus will have to be expanded to include 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. California will also need to take meaningful steps to reduce the incidence of racist nativism, including anti-Asian violence and anti-Asian rhetoric, in order for the state to preserve its comparative advantage as a welcoming place for immigrants. In short, discussions around immigrant integration will need to expand and be more inclusive of a range of issue areas and populations.

Moreover, 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 in the long run.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

California's immigrant integration agenda stands at a crossroads. After decades of being an immigrant hub, the state's share of foreign-born residents is on the decline. 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.

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. As community leaders and policymakers in California strategize on equitably moving forward and building back stronger, it is essential to include immigrants and immigrant communities in these conversations.



THE FUTURE OF IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION IN CALIFORNIA

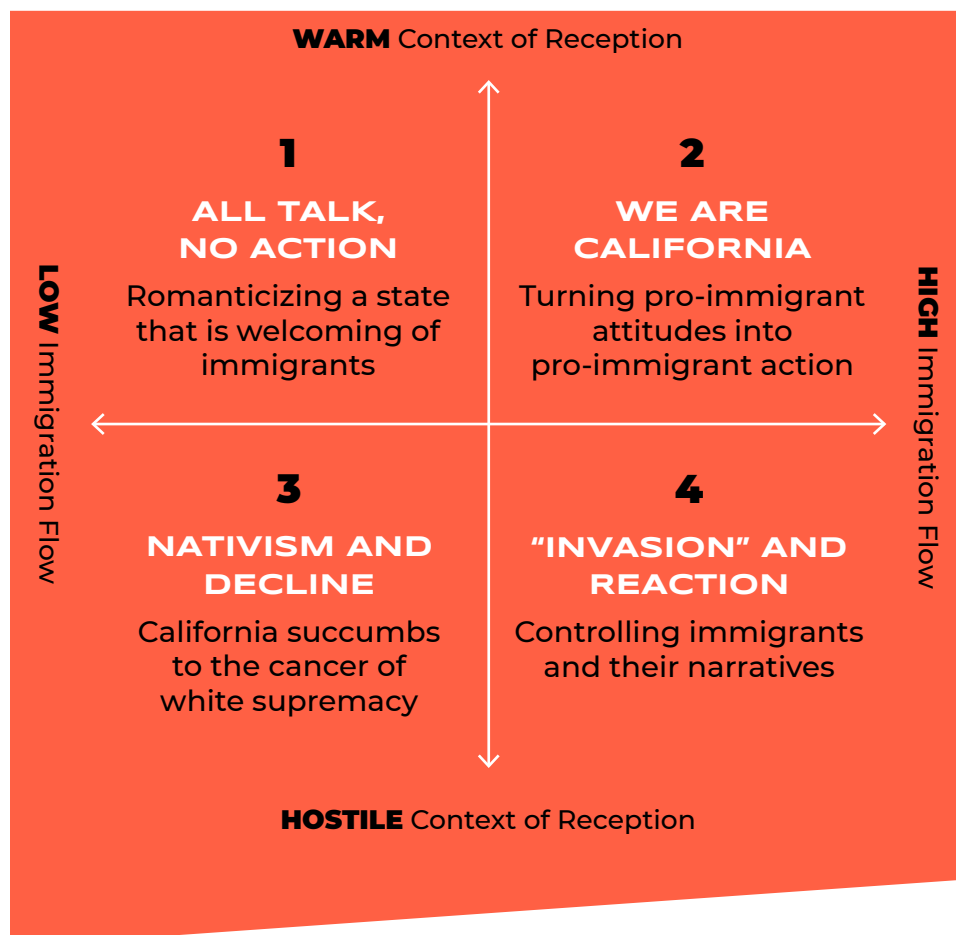
FOUR ALTERNATIVE SCENARIOS

SCENARIOS FROM THE FUTURE

IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

Foresight practitioners use scenarios to help make future possibilities more vivid and tangible, immersing the reader in the particular details of a future world so that they can mentally situate themselves in what it would feel like to live there. Without scenarios, the signals, trends, and other research that underlie strategic foresight work can feel distant and abstract. Scenarios can be used to center a group conversation in a positive and concrete picture of a future state so that stakeholders can pursue a shared vision for how to respond to that possibility, or mobilize action to avoid an undesirable outcome.

We believe the future of immigrant integration in California revolves around two primary uncertainties: (1) the size and nature of immigrant flows and (2) the receptivity of the state and the nature of support. It is important to acknowledge that immigrant flows into the country and the state are changing. While the current challenges at our southern border would lead some to conclude that the main story is about immigrants from Latin America, there has been a significant shift away from migrants coming from that region and to migrants of diverse social and ethnic backgrounds coming from Asia. Whether new immigrants come to California will depend on the state's "warmth of welcome." While California now has a well-earned reputation for relatively open arms—reflected in the hard-fought extension of health insurance to many undocumented residents and the delivery of emergency relief during the COVID-19 pandemic to mixed-status families that the federal government left out—the persistence of this more welcoming frame cannot be assumed.



ALL TALK, NO ACTION

Romanticizing a state that is welcoming of immigrants



California passes pro-immigrant legislation and promotes the “American Dream,” hyping narratives of economic opportunity and mobility for all. In reality, though, immigrants are competing for low-wage jobs and are struggling to afford high housing costs. This drives immigrants to leave coastal metros and, often, the state itself. While other states are more hostile to immigrants, they are also more affordable for immigrant incomes. As a result, California struggles with labor shortages. Pro-immigrant policies are more performative than real, failing to meaningfully support immigrants and reflecting undertones of lingering white supremacy. Fear of public charge and bureaucratic hurdles deter immigrants from accessing services, and the state does not address these barriers. Immigrant-serving organizations struggle to effectively distribute services and lose credibility with immigrant communities. Because many immigrants are also leaving the state, these organizations shrink.

○→ HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS

1891: The Immigration Act of 1891 subjected immigrants who became public charges to deportation.

1997: California Food Assistance Program provides state-funded food stamps for noncitizens.

2018: The state passed legislation limiting local law enforcement’s cooperation with ICE, yet counties responded differently.

2019: Under AB 133, California expanded access to Medi-Cal for undocumented young adults, paving the way for future expansion to undocumented seniors over 50.

➤➤➤ FUTURE DRIVERS

Housing: Costs continue to increase, forcing immigrants to relocate.

Economic Inequality: A bifurcated labor market and systemic barriers limit immigrants’ economic mobility.

Demographics: State resources fail to meet immigrants’ linguistic diversity.

White Supremacy & Nativism: White supremacy is challenged as ideology, but discrimination is rampant.

Global Crises: Climate refugees are welcomed, but the state lacks social services to ensure well-being.

⚡➤ SIGNALS

Skill mismatches

WHAT: California has the highest number of immigrants classified as underutilized immigrants.

SO WHAT: Licensing and credentialing requirements suppress an otherwise untapped labor pool in the state.

migrationpolicy.org

High cost of living

WHAT: California’s population growth slows as immigrants leave the state searching for more affordable regions.

SO WHAT: This population shift reflects the impact of the high cost of living that is not conducive to retaining immigrants and lower-income residents.

nytimes.com

Inaccessible public benefits

WHAT: During the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government excluded undocumented immigrants from financial relief.

SO WHAT: The need for economic relief far exceeds the supply, exacerbating challenges for vulnerable immigrants.

khn.org

WE ARE CALIFORNIA

Turning pro-immigrant attitudes into pro-immigrant action



Pro-immigrant attitudes are put into action and immigrants thrive mutually with the rest of California. Immigrants of all skills and backgrounds are pulled to California where they contribute extensively to and benefit from the growing economy. Progressive ideals drive inclusive and equitable policies that provide all immigrants and their children with comprehensive economic and social mobility tools. Immigrants are well represented in social and political institutions, leading to breakthrough policies addressing federal shortcomings, such as pathways to state citizenship for all immigrants. California leads the U.S. in pro-immigrant attitudes and policies, drawing in more immigrants from other states that do not provide the same level of support and protection. Despite this favorable picture, new concerns arise as high immigrant flows to the state introduce strains on resources like water and energy and lead to competition for work with native Californians.

○→ HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS

2014: Senate Bill 1159 requires licensing boards to consider applicants regardless of immigrant status.

2017: Senate Bill 54 designates California as a sanctuary state and limits local law enforcement cooperation with federal authorities to enforce federal immigration law.

2017: Assembly Bill 291 bars landlords from exploiting and discriminating based on immigration status.

2020: Assembly Bill 133 expands Medi-Cal coverage to low-income undocumented adults 50 years and older.

➤➤➤ FUTURE DRIVERS

Federalism: Increasingly anti-immigrant policies in the rest of the U.S. push more immigrants to California.

Demographics: The share of California's population that is either immigrant or a child of an

immigrant becomes a majority and an important political force.

White Supremacy & Nativism: Intersectional social movements address white supremacy and nativism.

Global Crises: California builds infrastructure to withstand climate change events in the state and combats climate change globally.

⚡➤ SIGNALS

Shifting public opinion

WHAT: A 2021 policy poll finds that voters support tax-paid healthcare and pathways to citizenship for undocumented immigrants.

SO WHAT: Public opinion around immigrant rights has shifted considerably from the 1990s.

ppic.org

Trustworthy institutions

WHAT: During the pandemic, the state government tapped immigrant-serving organizations to deliver benefits.

SO WHAT: California has made progress in integrating immigrant stakeholders into its strategies.

patch.com/california

Community belonging

WHAT: Immigrants who have become citizens have a higher homeownership rate than U.S.-born Californians.

SO WHAT: Long-term immigrants contribute back to the state in many forms, including taxes.

dornsife.usc.edu

NATIVISM AND DECLINE

California succumbs to the cancer of white supremacy



Xenophobia is normative and overt. Political forces have funneled anti-immigrant sentiments into the successful election of nativists at local, state, and national levels. Regions of the state that have never supported immigrants grow in organization and power. Immigrants and people of color get blamed for their lack of economic success and persuadable Californians move towards their narratives. The border is closed to those hoping to enter, and hostility is directed to immigrants already within, forcing an exodus of immigrants and their families to safer regions. As a result of the punitive political economy, the nation and California's economies are destabilized. A low inflow and a negative perception of immigrants result in less empathy and investment from philanthropy. Due to less funding, some immigrant-serving organizations are strained at capacity while some close their doors permanently.

○→ HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS

1790: The Naturalization Act prohibited naturalization for any non-white person.

1882: The Chinese Exclusion Act banned immigration of Chinese laborers to the U.S.

1954: Fueled by post-war economic decline and anti-immigrant sentiment, Operation Wetback forced 1 million Mexican farmworkers out of the U.S. without due process.

1986: Passed by California voters, Proposition 63 amended the state constitution, proclaiming English as the official state language.

2017: Law enforcement agencies aligned with ICE and anti-immigration activists to push back on California's "sanctuary state" legislation.

→→ FUTURE DRIVERS

Federalism: Elected officials reflect anti-immigrant sentiments. They tightly police the border and deter naturalization.

Economic Inequality: Work authorization for immigrants is

strictly limited. There is a push to buy and hire "American."

White Supremacy & Nativism: Nativist values are deeply woven into society's fabric. Organizing efforts to combat white supremacy are

overworked beyond capacity.

Global Crises: Climate disasters in California, such as wildfires, disproportionately affect and displace immigrant communities.

+→ SIGNALS

Conservative-led recall

WHAT: Conservative activists gathered enough signatures to force a recall election of Governor Newsom in 2021.

SO WHAT: Anti-immigrant rhetoric was strongly leveraged to make a case for the recall.

sfchronicle.com

Tracking migrants

WHAT: In 2019, AB 60 allowed Californians without immigration status to apply for a driver's license.

SO WHAT: Though this law was intended to help, it also gave immigration officials a new channel to track migrant populations and their movements.

nbcsandiego.com

Immigrant exclusion

WHAT: As of 2018, more than half of immigrant households in California are renters.

SO WHAT: As the disparity between wages and house prices increases, immigrants are more likely to leave the state for more hospitable conditions.

theatlantic.com

"INVASION" AND REACTION

Controlling immigrants and their narratives



California is home to many immigrants who face a hostile, unwelcoming environment. Pushed by factors like climate change and political violence, immigrants are lured to California by readily available jobs—albeit low-wage ones—and the state's outdated reputation as welcoming. However, an anti-immigrant reaction is fueled by racist and nativist ideologies and facilitates the economic exploitation of immigrant labor. Re-established relationships between local police and immigration enforcement create fear among immigrant communities, including U.S.-born loved ones and children. Immigrants without legal status are left to work in positions where threats of deportation keep immigrants from demanding better wages and protections. Business and civic leaders view immigrants solely through the prism of their economic contributions and do little to counter the negativity.

○→ HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS

1942: Bracero Program created a temporary intergovernmental agreement to use Mexican agricultural labor on U.S. farms.

1994: Prop 187 ended education and other essential services for undocumented immigrants.

2008: Secure Communities Program identified immigrants in U.S. jails who are deportable under immigration law.

2021: U.S. district court in Texas issued a decision that Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is unlawful.

→→→ FUTURE DRIVERS

Economic Inequality:

Immigrants are kept in underpaid, low-skilled jobs with little access to mobility.

White Supremacy & Nativism:

Nativism finds fertile ground in both U.S.-born and long-settled immigrants.

Global Crises: Climate pressures and instability in sending countries keeps migrants on the move.

+→ SIGNALS

The power of narratives

WHAT: Studies demonstrate that anti-immigrant media content is rising and carries influence.

SO WHAT: Anti-immigrant narratives have a long history and proven effect on citizens. Public service media has been demonstrated to mitigate this effect.

tandfonline.com

Compromised sanctuary

WHAT: Despite its formal status as a "Sanctuary State," California officials coordinate with ICE.

SO WHAT: Undocumented immigrants face vulnerable circumstances even in states that claim to protect them.

kqed.org/news

Wary of resources

WHAT: Many immigrants don't trust government-provided services in the face of constantly changing policies.

SO WHAT: As trust in government declines, vulnerable immigrant populations fall even further behind.

urban.org

FUTURE IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION POLICIES IN CALIFORNIA

Choices among governmental policies depend partly upon which future scenarios seem most attractive to us, but they also depend upon our perspectives on the proper role of government, on the resources available to government, and on the likelihood that government will succeed in its endeavors. Doing nothing is sometimes the best policy option, but doing nothing often uncritically accepts the current mix of policies and the future they entail without considering the alternatives. Over the past seventy-five years in California, that meant accepting discriminatory racial housing covenants, restrictive zoning laws, few restrictions on air or water pollution, “separate but equal” schooling, the dismantling of transit systems, and many more things that are now thought to have been wrong or misguided. We have also seen aggressive policy measures in California that have had unintended consequences, from the impacts of Proposition 13 on local government budgets to the way the California Environmental Quality Act has affected housing supply and manufacturing.

Because we are thinking about the future and we do not want to be hemmed in by the status quo or a lack of imagination, we put forth an array of alternative policies, and we tie them to different scenarios. Readers should consid-

er which scenario best captures the California they want to live in, and evaluate which policy recommendations they believe will get us there. While we offer a full array of policies to see how they fit in with each scenario, our team and most of the stakeholders we interviewed would prefer the We Are California future where high immigration flows are met with a warm context of reception. Partly as a result, we generally return in every scenario to policies necessary to have a more immigrant-inclusive state or to mitigate against outcomes that would result from hostile scenarios.

We should acknowledge that the broader context for immigration will be set by the federal government. However, whether new immigrants come to California will depend on the state’s narrative around immigration and its “warmth of welcome.” While attitude and political framing are important, so too are the concrete material conditions affecting immigrants. If the state does not get a handle on housing costs, educational quality, and employment opportunities, immigrants will find that California’s welcoming rhetoric is not matched by supportive policies and structures. All of these dynamics make each of our scenarios distinctly possible, with the choice of futures being up to state policymakers and civic leaders as we discuss below.

WE ARE CALIFORNIA

High Immigration Flow & Warm Context of Reception

California leads the nation with pro-immigrant attitudes that translate into actionable policies, pulling immigrants from other states with diverse skills and backgrounds. Immigrants comprise a significant share of the population, contributing extensively to and benefitting from the growing economy. Progressive ideals drive inclusive and equitable policies that provide all immigrant families with comprehensive tools for economic and social mobility. Barriers associated with immigration status are removed, resulting in well represented social, political, and public agencies. As such, these conditions allow the state to pass a state citizenship for all. Despite this favorable picture, new concerns arise as high immigration flows introduce strains on resources like water and energy, and lead to competition for work with native Californians. Concerns also arise over the source of funding for the resources offered specifically for immigrant communities.

California increases immigrant representation in state leadership and public agency roles

Due to an influx of immigrants, the state recognizes the need to increase immigrant representation in leadership roles. The state removes barriers associated with immigration status, allowing more immigrants to run for office and be appointed to state boards and commissions. These immigrants represent a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and skills, enhancing the state's diversity. In addition, many have an organizing background which facilitates collaboration with immigrant-serving organizations, allowing the state to have a more unified approach in advancing a pro-immigrant policy agenda, service provisions, and outreach approaches. The state also mandates that localities follow suit, by applying the same law to their local government structures with strict guidelines to ensure implementation across all localities.

The state's efforts build on prior policies like [SB-225](#), signed in [2019](#), which removed the citizenship requirement for state board and commission appoint-

ments, expanding the pool of eligible individuals. Localities took this legislation further: In [March of 2021](#), Santa Ana City passed a new law that allows residents of the city, regardless of immigration status, to serve on any of the city's 10 boards, committees, and commissions.

Increasing immigrant representation in institutions would ensure immigrants have a seat at the table and that the state is pushing for more inclusive policies and practices that will lead to positive structural changes. As a result, California's immigrant population would feel seen and represented in government, allowing the state to build trust with immigrant communities. These policy changes would contribute to improving the overall public attitude and a collective California identity that acknowledges and embraces diversity. Still, in the long-term some native-born Californians who are also running for office could point to the overrepresentation of immigrants in leadership roles and could reintroduce anti-immigrant narratives in their campaigns.

California expands voting rights to noncitizens

As a result of the federal government's stagnant efforts to pass comprehensive immigration reform, the Golden State takes it upon itself to expand voting rights to immigrants through state citizenship. Adapting elements from previous policies, California Citizenship is applicable to all residents in the state. Under this policy, every resident is granted a unique state ID, allowing them to vote in local elections and utilize the state's public benefits without exclusions. All state residents are mandated to apply for state citizenship in an attempt to blur the lines between immigrant and native-born Californian identities and to develop a collective California identity.

This policy effort expands on what was referred to as the "California package" and the "New York is Home Act." The "[California Package](#)," was a series of policies that the state passed to expand certain rights for immigrant communities. These policies range in scope and include providing in-state tuition to undocumented students (AB-540), allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain Driver's Licenses (AB-60), and prohibiting licensing boards from denying licenses based on citizen-

ship or immigration status (SB-1159). With the implementation of such comprehensive immigration policies, researchers point to the notion that these comprehensive laws granted immigrants certain rights, protections, and opportunities, forming a de facto citizenship or membership within the state. Additionally, New York was a leader in introducing [s7879](#), or the “New York is Home Act,” which would have established a distinct statewide citizenship that would grant certain benefits and rights to any resident regardless of their immigration status.

As a result of these policies, immigrant communities would have high voter turnout and more immigrants would be elected into office, continuing the momentum on a pro-immigrant policy agenda. However, native-born Californians could begin to feel as though the wellbeing of immigrants is prioritized over that of native-born Californians. Concerns can also arise, leading to tension among longer-settled immigrants and native Californians who believe that facilitating the right to vote for recently arrived immigrants is a misguided decision that defies federal laws. Talks of elevating these concerns to the Supreme Court ensue.

California institutionalizes and funds a statewide office of immigrant integration

California reintroduces and implements the California Office of Immigrant Affairs (CAOIA) given the increase in the immigrant population and the dire need for comprehensive services to support immigrants. CAOIA is established with the long-term goal of shaping and implementing a statewide coordinated, multi-year policy agenda and strategic plan on immigrant integration. With California’s growing inequality, the CAOIA is also tasked with ensuring structural changes are in place to provide basic necessities if immigrants are to be given the opportunity to stay in the state and build intergenerational wealth. To track and evaluate the agency’s progress in advancing immigrant rights, the CAOIA establishes multi-year milestones.

The CAOIA builds on prior proposals and former local policies. In 2015, California introduced SB 10 which would have established an Office of New Americans with

the purpose of coordinating an approach to immigrant integration policies. This specific bill was part of the “[Immigrants Shape California](#)” package, a set of policies aimed at advancing immigrant rights within the state. Although SB 10 was not passed, localities throughout California established their own version of this agency. For example, in 2015 San Jose City established its own Office of Immigrant Affairs and the County of Santa Clara established its own Office of Immigrant Relations.

With an established and well-funded CAOIA, state and local governments would be more intentional in including immigrants in policies committed to more affordable housing, universal healthcare, and universal basic income. State and local governments would also work in tandem to secure immigrants’ access to resources building skills, such as mandating educational institutions to address barriers to free and public education and incentivizing businesses to partner with immigrant-serving organizations to provide accessible job training programs. Through CAOIA, the state and local agencies would have the resources and network to integrate trusted community leaders and immigrant-serving organizations in developing immigrant-inclusive policies and programs. Yet, with California’s growing inequality and changing labor demands, many native-born Californians could express concern over the funding for this new office and the workforce development efforts targeted at assisting immigrants.

ALL TALK, NO ACTION

Low Immigration Flow & Warm Context of Reception

California passes pro-immigrant legislation and promotes the “American Dream,” perpetuating narratives of economic opportunity and mobility for all. In reality, though, immigrants are competing for low-wage jobs and struggle to afford high housing costs – driving immigrants to leave unaffordable metros and, often, the state itself. While other states are more hostile to immigrants, they are also more affordable for immigrants. As a result, California struggles with a crippling labor shortage. Pro-immigrant policies like sanctuary laws are more performative, failing to meaningfully support immigrants and reflecting undertones of lingering white supremacy.

California expands temporary and limited employment opportunity programs

To combat a shrinking workforce brought on by the Great Resignation and an already shrinking population, California adopts and expands state-level temporary work programs similar to existing federal programs, including H-2A (Temporary Agricultural Employment of Foreign Workers) and H-2B (Temporary Non-Agricultural Workers) guest worker programs. The state expands the definition of temporary and seasonal work to capitalize on immigrants' low-cost labor in other sectors. These programs aim to address labor shortages without extensive commitment to immigrant workers' rights and well-being. Due to the focus on temporary or seasonal work, immigrant workers have no viable pathway to permanent residency.

Current programs, like DACA, similarly provide a welcoming but temporary solution and are used to justify the “guest worker” approach. Business leaders encourage temporary migration for cheap and exploitable labor and employ “don’t ask, don’t tell” attitudes to retain low-paid service, construction, and manufacturing workers. Without adequate protections, immigrants participating in these programs would be vulnerable to exploitation and wage theft, similar to California’s Bracero Program. Temporary and contract work is widespread; thus, immigrants of all skill levels would turn to other states for better and more secure economic opportunities.

California maintains housing policies that make it illegal to discriminate against immigrants – but immigrants still aren’t fully housed because of other policies

Since 2018, amended by AB 291, it is illegal for landlords to evict or threaten tenants based on immigration or citizenship status. Though an important policy to prevent discrimination in the state’s housing market, it does not address the shrinking supply of homes available and skyrocketing prices.

State and local policies have upheld outdated zoning laws and stifled the production of affordable housing and high-density housing development. With no vacant and affordable options, working class immigrants have been incentivized to leave the costly state to avoid overcrowded homes, long commutes, and displacement due to gentrification. Despite the state's attempts to address the housing crisis (e.g., Senate Bill 5), Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY)-backed advocacy and local opposition have dug in and diminished their efficacy. Self-proclaimed progressive leaders and homeowners often prioritize their home values, community character, and property rights over the need to address housing, which disproportionately affects low-income residents of color and immigrants. Facing a persistent housing crisis, the state provides limited public assistance, like rent subsidies, to maintain a progressive façade. Nevertheless, the bureaucratic maze is impossible to navigate and the eviction rate among immigrant households grows.

Rather than subject their children to poor education systems, public health concerns, and crime in deteriorating neighborhoods, immigrants take the risk of relocating—sometimes to other states where the reception is hostile but the economy is better and housing is more affordable. This would further damage California's already shrinking labor supply and economy. To avoid this, California adopts policies that will increase access to and the supply of affordable housing, like expanding current federal housing programs (e.g., Section 8 and Public Housing) to increase the availability of vouchers and to remove immigration status requirements.

California provides immigrants with temporary relief

California's limited, temporary, and reactionary policies do not systemically address the core issues leading to immigrants' vulnerable conditions. [Barriers to accessing temporary relief](#) persist, especially for undocumented immigrants, including significant documentation to access services (e.g. rental receipts and regular paystubs). Applications have all moved to digital platforms, creating another barrier, especially for unhoused and poorly-housed immigrants living on the other side of the digital divide. Fewer translations are available due to the declining number of immigrants, posing acute challenges, especially for linguistically-isolated households from Asian, Black, and Indigenous communities.

State disaster relief assistance for immigrants ineligible for federal aid were made available during the COVID-19 pandemic proves to be a policy model: see an issue of inequity and then completely underfund it with a token policy effort. [Organizations responsible for disbursing funds remain overwhelmed and spread thin](#) by the demand that outweighs the availability of resources. In maintaining this status quo, immigrants would continue to barely survive rather than to fully thrive. Despite generally warm attitudes, the lack of resources and high cost of living would push immigrants away from a state that is allegedly immigrant-friendly, but offers immigrants few substantial opportunities to integrate and build intergenerational wealth.

“INVASION” AND REACTION

High Immigration Flow & Hostile Context of Reception

Home to an already significant number of immigrants, the state continues to experience a high inflow of migrants due to push factors like climate change and political violence. Immigrants are lured to California by readily available—albeit low-paying—jobs and the state’s traditional, but outdated “welcoming” reputation. The reality is that Californians can react negatively to large influxes of migrants and refugees—and policy decisions, or the lack thereof, reinforce discriminatory and anti-immigrant narratives. An anti-immigrant reaction is fueled by racist and nativist ideologies that facilitate the exploitation of immigrant labor. Re-established relationships between local police and immigration enforcement create fear for immigrants and their families. Undocumented immigrants face threats of deportation, preventing them from demanding better working conditions. Business and civic leaders’ actions reflect their value of immigrants solely on their economic contributions and do little to counter the negativity.

California limits immigrant rights in the workplace

With a large influx of immigrants, anti-immigrant narratives pressure state and regional policymakers to improve labor market conditions for native-born Californians. California overturns AB 1236, which currently prohibits state and local jurisdictions from being federally mandated to utilize E-Verify to determine an employee's eligibility to work in the U.S. The state also requires all employers to participate in E-Verify to satisfy nativist constituents and to curb the number of undocumented workers across sectors. Noncompliance would result in sanctions or fees incurred by employers.

As of 2021, E-Verify is mandated in 22 states ⁵ for some or all employers. Like California, Arizona shares a border with Mexico and faces similar, polarizing immigration policy debates. For example, the [Legal Arizona Workers Act was implemented in 2007](#) prohibiting businesses from knowingly or intentionally hiring “unauthorized aliens” or immigrant workers without lawful status and requiring the use of E-Verify. This policy was the result of growing anti-immigrant rhetoric in the state—particularly the hotly contested adage that immigrant workers “steal” jobs from American-born workers. If California were to enter a period of growing anti-immigrant sentiment and group threat, particularly concerning the availability of jobs and framing immigrants as scapegoats for economic downturn, it is likely that the state would follow the adoption of such policies as the Legal Arizona Workers Act. Adopting such a policy would provide a low-cost approach to mollifying constituents, however, its efficacy would be in question. Like in many states that enforce E-Verify, this policy may not reduce the number of undocumented immigrants but rather create unintended economic and societal consequences.

Limiting immigrant rights in the workplace would create a hostile and exclusionary labor landscape for undocumented workers who may be forced into unprotected, ill-regulated sectors of work. Employers would have more power to exploit employees by threatening arrest or deportation. Unintended consequences mean lawful immigrant workers with ties to undocumented immigrants can be deterred from entering the workforce. This could also create a labor shortage in “less-skilled” and low-wage sectors where native-born workers are less likely and willing to work, including agriculture.

⁵ Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and West Virginia

California restricts public benefits and services based on immigration status

California's nativist and white supremacist ideals fester in small pockets and infect the rest of the state, as misinformation spreads with the proliferation of technology and social media. Hostility fueled by misleading anti-immigrant narratives and feelings of group threat spark the election of conservative leaders. Anti-immigrant advocates in California expand on the goals of [Proposition 187 in 1994](#) by seeking to restrict undocumented immigrants and lawful noncitizens from utilizing the state's public services, including healthcare. Even if this measure comes up short, the political writing on the wall is clear and the state penalizes noncitizens who use these public services and directs teachers and healthcare workers to report undocumented immigrants to Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Similar to Prop 187, nativist policymakers would rely on anti-immigrant sentiment to gain public support to pass these policies. These policies would build on the belief that immigrants are burdens on their host societies because they "steal" jobs and exploit social benefits. This argument further pushes an agenda that less immigration and more deterrence policies are needed to protect Californian citizens, their resources, and the state. This rhetoric would be especially strategic amidst a period of economic downturn, during which anti-immigrant forces would blame economic woes on the number of immigrants in the workforce. This narrative would be so insidious and pervasive that long-settled immigrants perpetuate these ideas against more recent newcomers, distancing themselves from their cultural identities and ridiculing those who are not assimilated.

A chilling effect would endure as a result of these policies. Immigrant families, regardless of status, would fear [harassment when accessing resources, applying for jobs, going to the hospital, and engaging in other daily essential activities](#). Immigrant families who need these important public services to survive would avoid them entirely to mitigate threats of deportation. Immigrant communities would feel intimidated by these policies, making integration and mobility nearly impossible.

California undoes “sanctuary policies” and partners with federal enforcement agencies

With increased migration to California due to global and economic push factors, xenophobia is pitched as a natural reaction to increasing job competition and economic inequality. Localities and the state react through increased enforcement as a means to control the mobility and freedoms of “illegal” immigrants. Specifically, the state repeals [Senate Bill 54](#), which prohibits local law enforcement agencies (LEAs) from cooperating with federal immigration agencies to engage in immigration enforcement operations. Local LEAs are also forced to partner with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to surveil, arrest, and deport immigrants. Similar to the federal opt-in policy of [287\(g\) cooperation agreements](#) between local and federal LEA's, this legislation pressures pro-immigrant localities such as Los Angeles and San Francisco to comply with ICE and CBP to conduct operations.

To simultaneously maintain the supply of cheap labor and appease anti-immigrant forces, local police departments throughout the state work together to contract with ICE officers to create a shared database of information on undocumented immigrants in particular. Immigrants are tracked and workplace raids are rampant.

These policies would lead to increased family separation and public investment expanding the state's carceral system of immigrant detention centers. Local Leas would increase discriminatory stops and arrests of people of color and immigrants illegitimately suspected of being undocumented. Immigrants would continue to live in fear and in the shadows, as law enforcement is given more power to explicitly discriminate. This would disincentivize immigrants from staying in California while also worsening fear among immigrants who have no other choice than to stay in this surveillance state. Immigrants who remain avoid any activity that e increases the risk of engaging with any government or law enforcement official.

NATIVISM AND DECLINE

Low Immigration Flow & Hostile Context of Reception

Xenophobia is normalized and overt. Political forces have funneled anti-immigrant sentiments into the successful election of nativists at local, state, and national levels. Enforcement at the U.S.-Mexico border has grown and hostility directed to immigrants already settled in the state worsens, forcing an exodus of immigrant families to safer regions. With a shrinking immigrant population, fewer victims are subjected to violent hate crimes on the basis of nationality, but fewer immigrant rights advocates remain. Political power among immigrant groups also weakens, allowing conservative groups to push their anti-immigrant policy agenda and divest resources for immigrant communities.

California bans multiethnic curricula and reverts to English-only public institutions

In reproducing the xenophobic and nativists views of immigrants, California bans critical race theory, ethnic studies, immigrant history, and diversity trainings from its educational and workforce curriculum. The state further sets guidelines that penalize individuals, schools, and government institutions violating this ban, including withholding state funds. The state readopts past English-only policies across all institutions where Californians are reprimanded for speaking another language.

Adopting a state ban on multiethnic curricula and training would reflect current trends across the U.S. (e.g. HB 2898 in Arizona, SB 148 in Florida, HB 590 in Tennessee, and HB 3979 in Texas) banning Critical Race Theory in schools and public institutions. Similar debates and potential bans on Critical Race Theory are already occurring in California at the local level (e.g., Placentia-Yorba Linda School District). Conservative policymakers and media have increasing influence on the public,

convincing their constituents that discussions of racism, nativism, and its history in the country are anti-American. California's history proves that the state is not immune to such nativist arguments and anti-immigrant attitudes. For example, under Proposition 227, California required nearly all class instruction to be in English from 1998 to 2016, which was found to be detrimental to immigrant students.

These policies would make it more difficult for immigrants to integrate and achieve social mobility. Additionally, the ensuing false narratives around immigration would create difficult and unsafe living conditions, further deterring immigrants from coming to California. Consequently, the state would continue to see a shrinking immigrant population, negatively impacting the state's labor supply and economy.

California adopts and enforces a public charge rule

The polarizing political and economic landscape facilitates the passage of a public charge rule by conservative and nativist policymakers on the grounds of security and austerity. This rule requires immigration officials to consider a noncitizen's propensity to use public services and dependency on government resources to deny admission into the U.S. or lawful permanent resident status (i.e., green card).

Despite the overturning of the Public Charge rule under the Trump Administration, several states, including neighboring Arizona, continue to enforce this policy. Adopting this policy would prevent noncitizens from accessing needed public resources and create chilling effects deterring other immigrants from accessing health care, public education, and public welfare programs (e.g., WIC). This would be detrimental to the well-being of immigrant communities residing in California, especially those facing poverty. The number of working-class immigrants, refugees, and asylees migrating to the state would also decrease, as they are more likely to be deemed public charges than their wealthier counterparts. The state would face detrimental effects on the labor supply of low-skilled workers and the economy.

California is an influential state in diffusing policies. In the past, California's anti-immigrant policies (e.g., Proposition 187) helped pave the way for other states

and the federal government to enact copycat laws, including core tenets of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996. California's public charge rules would embolden other entities to emulate and justify similar rules under the guise of security and austerity. Similar policies could garner enough support to become politically feasible at the federal level, worsening the living conditions of low-income immigrant communities across the country.

California limits work authorization and employment opportunities for immigrants

In response to economic turmoil and growing income insecurity among U.S.-born workers, California reduces the number of immigrant workers across sectors by emulating the Buy American and Hire American Executive Order under the Trump Administration. This policy significantly restricts access to H-1B and L-1 Visas. The state also overturns SB 1159, revoking requirements for licensing boards to consider all applicants regardless of immigration status.

These policies would be politically feasible with the reemergence of the labor movement that views immigrant laborers as competition and a source of wage reduction. Labor unions have been an influential force in American and Californian politics, though historically not an ally to immigrants. This sentiment changed dramatically in the last several decades, however, increasing economic pressures could fuel a nativist labor movement that would successfully lobby for policies restricting work authorization and job mobility for immigrants.

With the intent to safeguard jobs for U.S.-born workers, these policies would significantly reduce immigrant representation in high-skilled sectors that have relied significantly on immigrant labor (e.g., technology). Such firms and businesses may [experience market devaluation](#), further incentivizing an exodus of corporations to other states. Immigrants who were educated and licensed in other countries would be vulnerable to downward mobility and skills-job mismatch. Ultimately, California would risk the vitality of its economy.

CALIFORNIA BECOMING...

High Immigration Flow & Warm Context of Reception

We have offered four potential future scenarios on immigrant integration in the Golden State based on two critical uncertainties: immigration flow and context of reception. We have stressed a goal of California providing better representation and access to services and resources for immigrants so that both U.S.-born and immigrant residents can thrive. We realize that this is not guaranteed and so for each of the potential scenarios that move away from that goal, we discussed consequential policies that would either facilitate or mitigate what might be the worst effects of turning away from the state's relatively welcoming reputation.

Considering all the possibilities is important. California is at a crossroads as concerns of a declining and aging population threatens the growth and vitality of the state's economy. To combat the social, economic, and political consequences of a shrinking workforce and increasing demands for diverse skill levels across sectors, we believe that California must do more to attract and keep immigrants in the state. It is not enough to purport pro-immigrant attitudes when increasing costs of living in the state are outpacing economic gains and opportunities. Immigrants are leaving coastal metros and the state to other more affordable regions, despite leaning less immigrant-friendly than California.

From a moral and economic standpoint, we find the long-term goals of the *We Are California* scenario the most mutually-beneficial to the state and its residents. High immigration flow provides California a solution to its declining and aging population. Immigrants, including asylees and refugees, in search of greater economic opportunities and a better life can continue to contribute to and grow the state's cultural and economic capital. A warm context of reception would keep immigrants coming to the Golden State and lay the foundation for actionable policies that address the inequities immigrants face in the labor market, housing, and civic participation.

Throughout history, immigrants have helped to build and sustain cities and economies across this country despite exploitation, discrimination, and unjust policies deterring their belonging and integration in the U.S. Having experienced its own dark seasons of exclusion, California can now stress the power and possibility of mutuality. And what happens in California will not just stay in California: just as the state's anti-immigrant policies (e.g., Proposition 187) sparked the adoption of copycat laws in other localities and at the national level, whatever path California takes in its approach to immigrant integration will have reverberating effects for immigrants across the country. What we choose will determine the future of the Golden State but also the trajectory of the United States.

