

Immigrants in California

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➤ California has more immigrants than any other state.

California is home to almost 11 million immigrants—about a quarter of the foreign-born population nationwide. In 2019, the most current year of data, 27% of California’s population was foreign born, more than double the percentage in the rest of the country. Foreign-born residents represented at least one-third of the population in five California counties: Santa Clara (39%), San Mateo (35%), Los Angeles (34%), San Francisco (34%), and Alameda (33%). Half of California children have at least one immigrant parent.

➤ Most immigrants in California are documented residents.

More than half (53%) of California’s immigrants are naturalized US citizens, and another 25% have some other legal status (including green cards and visas). According to the Center for Migration Studies, about 22% of immigrants in California are undocumented. From 2010 to 2019, the number of undocumented immigrants in the state declined from 2.9 million to 2.3 million.

➤ After decades of rapid growth, the number of immigrants has leveled off.

In the 1990s, California’s immigrant population grew by 2.4 million people, a 37% increase. But in the first decade of the 2000s, growth slowed to 15% (1.3 million), and in the past 10 years, the increase was only 6% (about 600,000). The decline in international immigration has contributed to the slowdown of California’s overall population growth.

➤ The majority of recent arrivals are from Asia.

The vast majority of California’s immigrants were born in Latin America (50%) or Asia (39%). California has sizable populations of immigrants from dozens of countries; the leading countries of origin are Mexico (3.9 million), the Philippines (859,000), China (796,000), Vietnam (539,000), and India (513,000). However, among immigrants who arrived between 2010 and 2019, more than half (53%) were born in Asia, while 31% were born in Latin America.

➤ Most of California’s immigrants are bilingual.

More than two-thirds (70%) of immigrants in California report speaking English proficiently, while 10% speak no English. Even among recent immigrants, those in the US for five years or less, 66% report proficiency in English, while 12% speak no English. At home, most immigrants speak a language other than English, with Spanish and Chinese (including Mandarin and Cantonese) being the most common.

➤ California’s immigrants have varying levels of education.

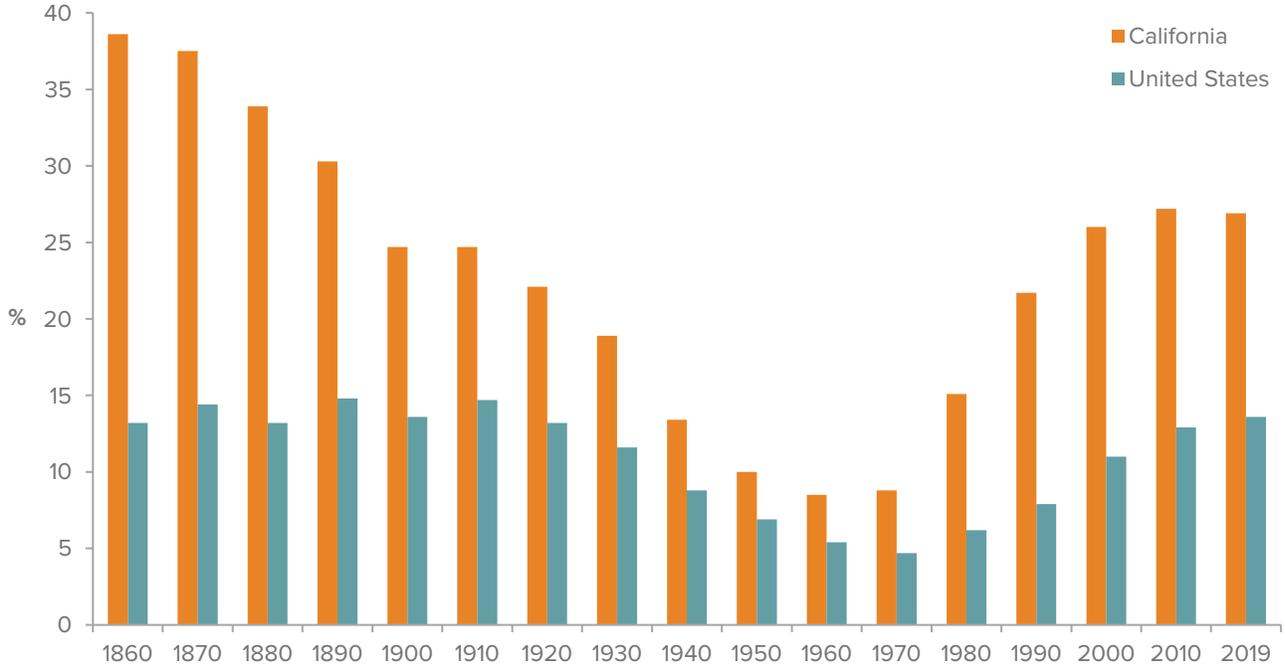
Among working-age Californians (age 25–64), foreign-born residents accounted for 70% of those without a high school diploma and 32% of those with at least a bachelor’s degree. But recent immigrants and immigrants from Asia tend to have **high levels of educational attainment**. Half of foreign-born residents who have come to the state since 2010—and 61% of those who have come from Asia—have at least a bachelor’s degree. Overall, 29% of California’s immigrants have not completed high school, compared with 7% of US-born California residents. Thirty-two percent of California’s foreign-born residents have a bachelor’s degree, compared to 38% of US-born residents.

➤ Californians have positive views of immigrants.

Nearly four in five Californians (78%) believe immigrants are a benefit to the state because of their hard work and job skills, compared to only 18% who believe they are a burden. An even larger share (87%) believe there should be a way for undocumented immigrants to stay in the country legally, and **a majority (61%)** favor state and local governments making their own policies and taking actions, separate from the federal government, to protect the legal rights of undocumented immigrants in California.

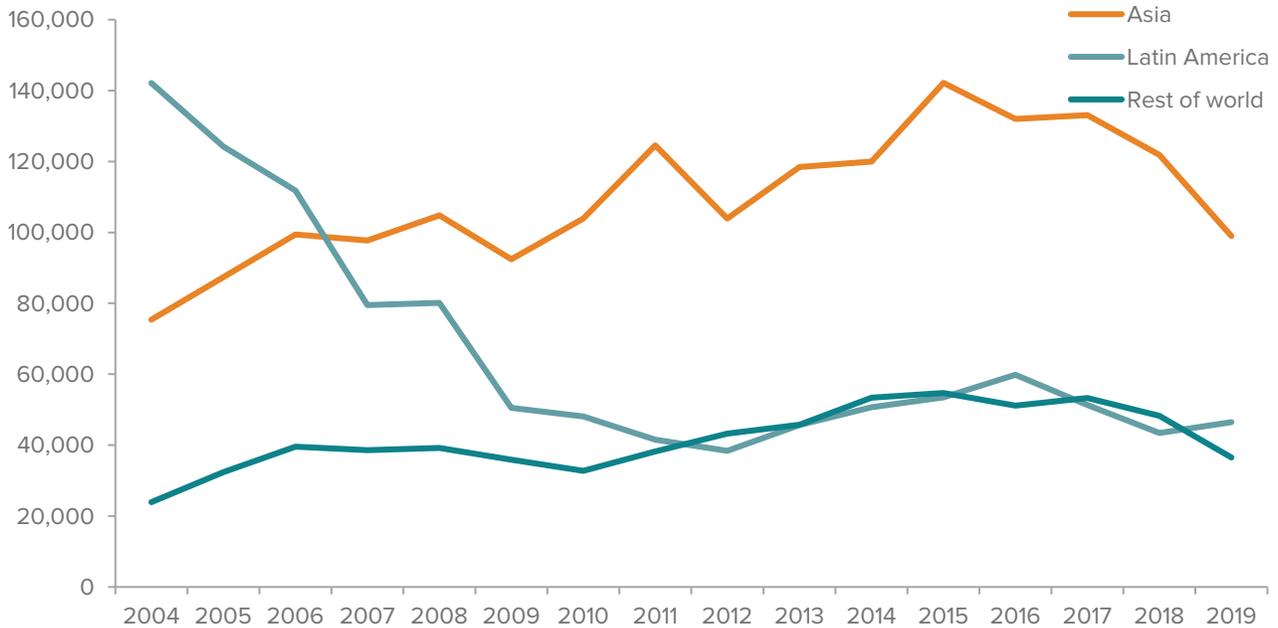


The share of immigrants in California has stabilized in recent decades at relatively high levels



Source: US Census Bureau, decennial censuses, and the American Community Survey.

Even with recent slowdowns, Asia is the leading source of recent immigrants to California



Source: American Community Survey.

Note: New arrivals are based on the place of residence one year prior to the survey (excluding US-born citizens).

Sources: American Community Survey and decennial census data from the US Census Bureau and IPUMS; Ruggles et al., *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 6.0* (University of Minnesota, 2021); Robert Warren, *In 2019, the US Undocumented Population Continued a Decade-Long Decline and the Foreign-Born Population Neared Zero Growth* (Center for Migration Studies, 2021); Baldassare et al., *PPIC Statewide Survey: Californians and Their Government (PPIC, March 2019 and January 2021)*.

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