

California's Ethnic Trends

A Lapkoff & Gobalet Demographic Research Report - Fall 2003

California's ethnic mix is shifting rapidly and so is the way people see themselves and others. These changing patterns can cause confusion. Yet ethnic and racial classifications are used by many public and private organizations in efforts to achieve legal and socioeconomic equity. In this research report we review recent California population trends and offer some demographic insights into the future.

California Leads the Nation in Ethnic Diversity

Although Census 2000 results may not surprise Californians who live among a variety of ethnic groups, it is worth noting that the state is quite different from the nation: California has proportionately larger Hispanic, Asian, and multiracial populations and smaller White and African American populations than the U.S. as a whole (see Chart 1). *Interestingly, the current U.S. profile resembles California's racial mix of 20 years ago.*

In the San Francisco Bay Area, the percent Asian is the highest in California, almost double the state rate. Hispanics are only one-fifth of the population. But even in the Bay Area, the percent Hispanic is growing.

While non-Hispanic Whites are still California's largest group, there is little doubt that Hispanics will one day outnumber them. Chart 2 indicates why: Hispanics have by far the largest share of the younger population (48 percent of the state's preschoolers are Hispanic, 32 percent are White). Around age 30, Hispanics and Whites have approximately equal populations. Whites are the vast majority of the oldest Californians. But as time passes and today's children grow older, Hispanics will be the majority of the state's adult population.

Other ethnic groups (African Americans and Asians) are relatively small and their share of the population does not vary much by age.

Chart 1: In California, Whites are Still the Largest Group, but Less than 50 Percent

data from <http://www.census.gov>

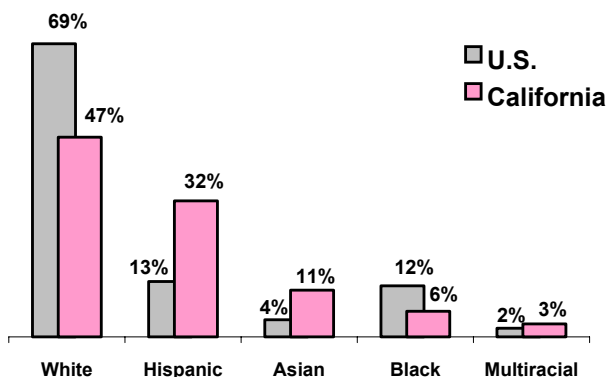
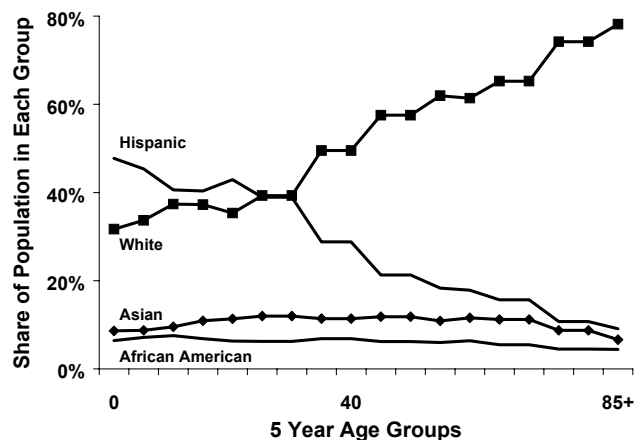


Chart 2: When Today's Children Grow Up, Hispanics Will Be California's Majority

data from <http://www.census.gov>





New California Birth Trend

After 20 years of increase, the number of births to Californians began to decline in 1990. This happened nationwide. The turnaround was important to schools, child care providers, medical agencies, and many others. The shift will continue to have long-term consequences as the smaller birth cohorts age.

The table shows a 52 percent *increase* in California birth numbers between 1980 and 1990, followed by a 13 percent *decrease* during the 1990s. By the mid-1990s many agencies serving young children, including school districts, were surprised by shrinking numbers of preschoolers and elementary school students, although this was predictable from the birth data.

Year	California Births	Percent Change
1970	362,652	
1980	402,720	+11%
1990	611,666	+52%
2000	531,285	-13%

Data from California Department of Health Services, Center for Health Statistics.

Why the Birth Decline after 1990?

At least three major factors contributed to the state's birth decline during the 1990s:

- As the baby-boom generation (born between 1946 and 1964) reached middle age, there were fewer women of child-bearing age. In 1990, the average Baby Boomer was 35 years old, and in 2000 she was 45.
- The early 1990s recession had two effects that also reduced the state's birth numbers: more people moved out of California than moved in (leaving fewer women of childbearing age), and couples probably postponed having children while waiting for the economy to improve.
- Through the decade, childbearing rates for teens fell by almost one-third in California, a national trend especially apparent among African Americans.

Hispanic Births Buck California Trend

Birth patterns have varied by ethnic group. Between 1970 and 1990, the number of Hispanic births increased from 72,009 to 229,344 (245 percent), while White births remained relatively unchanged. After 1990, birth trends changed for all ethnic groups: Hispanic births leveled off,

while White and African American births dropped (Chart 3). The emerging patterns promise significant changes in the state's overall future population mix.

Future Birth Trends

Virtually all demographers who forecast the state's population by ethnicity expect a significant increase in California births by 2020, but the magnitude of the forecasted increase varies because they make different assumptions about the Hispanic birth rate.

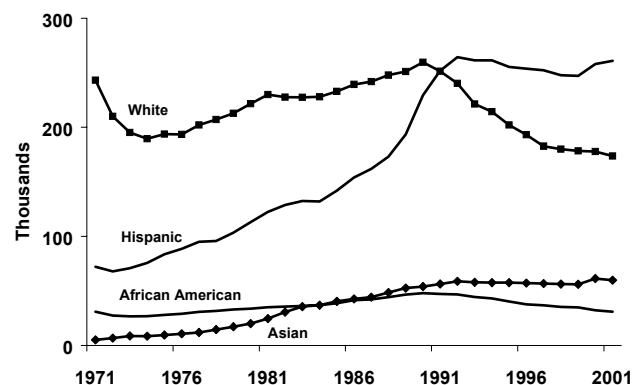
Hispanics now in school will become the largest childbearing group in just a decade. *Today's* Hispanic women have about twice as many children as Whites, partly because they start childbearing while relatively young. But will *tomorrow's* Hispanic women, many born in the U.S., reproduce as their mothers did? Academics are studying the assimilation patterns of second and third generation Hispanics. Most studies show significant assimilation and improvement in status, though Hispanics have not reached the level of Whites in many socioeconomic areas. So, Hispanic families will no doubt become smaller than they are today, but by how much?

Another factor contributing to lower Hispanic birth rates is the rapidly falling Latin American births rates. Future immigrants from the region are likely to have lower birth rates than today's immigrants.

But even if Hispanic birth rates fall, they are not likely to fall to the level of Whites, so expect birth increases by 2020.

Chart 3: The Number of Hispanic Births Rose Sharply between 1970 and 1990, then Stabilized

Data from California Department of Health Services, Center for Health Statistics.
<http://www.dhs.ca.gov/hisp/chs/OHIR/vssdata/tables.htm>



Is the Importance of Race Diminishing?

"We expect that 25 years from now, the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary . . ."

—Justice Sandra Day O'Connor in *Grutter v. Bollinger et al.*, regarding the University of Michigan Law School's admissions policy (June 23, 2003).

Why do people care about race and ethnicity? Ending discrimination is one reason. Civil rights laws are intended to ensure that African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Native Americans do not suffer discrimination in employment, housing, schooling, and voting. The U.S. Census Bureau and other government agencies collect information on race and ethnicity to measure discrimination and to allocate program resources. However, the government's racial and ethnic categories have shifted over time, and they recently became much more numerous and potentially confusing.

What are the differences among race, ethnicity, and nationality?

"Race" generally means physiological differences (like skin color) among human groups, whereas "ethnicity" means cultural differences, and "nationality" means citizenship. Nevertheless the terms are sometimes used interchangeably and can lead to misunderstanding. For example, official definitions say that Hispanics are not a race, but an ethnicity, and one based largely on use of the Spanish language.

What about multiracial people?

Census 2000 contributed to the confusion about race and ethnicity. It allowed people to report multiple ancestries, resulting in scores of multi-racial identities and, for each one, Hispanic/non-Hispanic status. Just two per-

cent of the U.S. population reported more than one race. One demographer noted at the 2003 Population Association Meetings that "we can muddle through for now because the numbers are so small," but it will become more difficult to study people by race as the multiracial share increases.

Though just three percent of Californians chose more than one racial category in Census 2000, demographers expect the share to grow rapidly because, as one of the most diverse states, California offers many opportunities for interracial marriage. As large groups of immigrants assimilate, cultural and socioeconomic barriers will fall, promoting more inter-group marriage and childbearing.

Will racial and ethnic categories ever disappear?

Although demographers do not expect people to ignore racial and ethnic differences, we do expect the categories to become less indicative of socioeconomic status. We also expect racial and ethnic discrimination to become less common for demographic, as well as legal, reasons. The demographic reasons center on increasing population diversity and intermarriage among groups. The categories people use to identify themselves will continue to change.

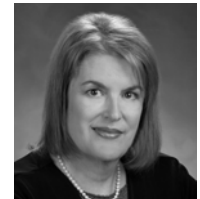
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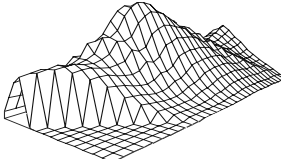
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Please visit our website (www.Demographers.com) for more information and links to data sources.



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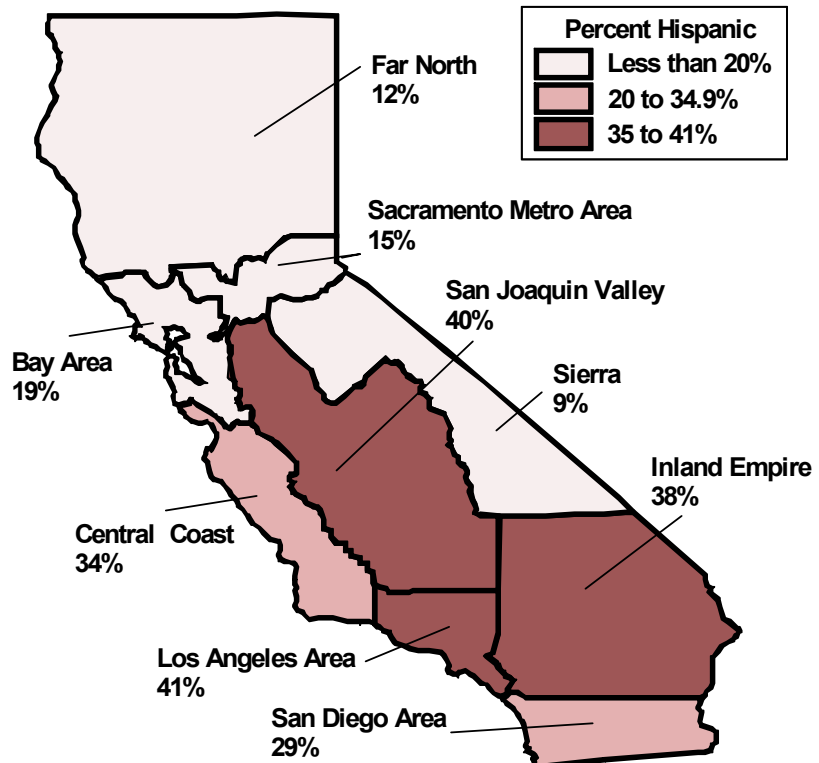
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Hispanic Population Share in California Regions, 2000



Census 2000 showed that Hispanics had the largest population shares in Los Angeles and the San Joaquin Valley, while their shares were much smaller in the mountains and northern part of the state.