

National Equity Atlas

California Jobs First:

Equity Indicators for the Central Coast Region

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PolicyLink

USC Dornsife
Equity Research Institute



About the National Equity Atlas

The **National Equity Atlas** is a first-of-its-kind data and policy tool, produced through a partnership between PolicyLink and the USC Equity Research Institute. It equips communities, advocates, and policymakers with actionable data and strategies to advance racial and economic equity in the United States.

About This Profile

This data portrait provides insights on racial equity, economic inclusivity, and environmental justice to support community and labor groups engaged in planning efforts related to **California Jobs First** (formerly the Community Economic Resilience Fund). It also demonstrates how community groups and analysts can leverage available data to explore equity issues and identify opportunities to address regional disparities.

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An aerial photograph of a city, likely San Diego, with two prominent, rounded mountains in the background. The city is densely packed with buildings and trees, and the scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of late afternoon or early morning. The word "Introduction" is overlaid in large white text on the left side of the image.

Introduction

Introduction

California Jobs First

California Jobs First (formerly the Community Economic Resilience Fund) represents a generational opportunity for California's regions to advance economic strategies anchored in racial equity, economic inclusivity, and environmental sustainability.

Established by the state of California in 2021, the \$600 million fund was designed to “deliver a sustainable and equitable economic future that meets communities and regions where they are by supporting new regional plans and investing in strategies and projects that help diversify regional economies and develop or expand environmentally sustainable industries that create high-quality, broadly accessible jobs for all Californians.”

The program's [vision](#) is to:

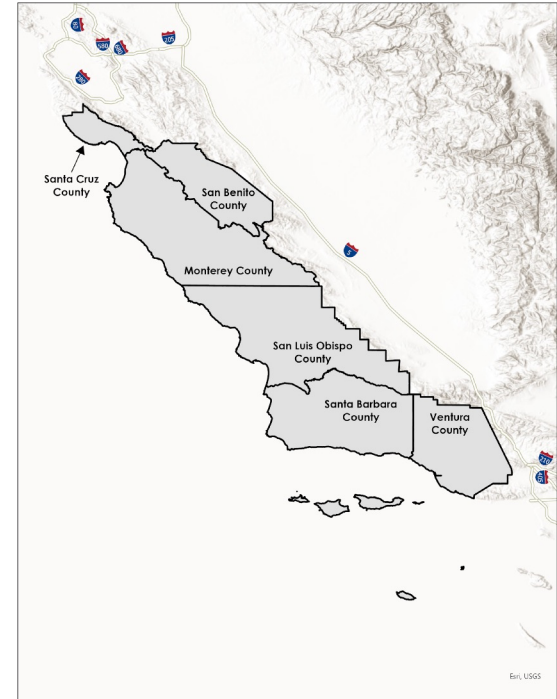
- Promote a sustainable and equitable recovery from Covid-19 that creates high-quality and accessible jobs for all Californians;
- Support the development of regional economic roadmaps for building sustainable economic growth and driving investments in industries that will thrive in a carbon-neutral future;
- Align and leverage state, federal, philanthropic, and private-sector investments to maximize recovery efforts and catalyze long-term economic resilience; and
- Integrate the priorities of community residents into regional planning processes.

Introduction

The Central Coast Region

Home to 2.3 million residents, the Central Coast region comprises six counties that form an oceanside corridor between the state's two major population centers, the San Francisco Bay Area and the Greater Los Angeles region. The region contains a major part of California's agricultural and viticultural economies as well as a good portion of the state's coastal mountain ranges and forests. A trio of economic development organizations formed the [Uplift Central Coast coalition](#) and applied for a \$5 million California Jobs First grant, with the goal of creating thousands of climate-friendly, carbon-neutral jobs for all the region's residents. Recognizing the region's widespread income inequality as well as its myriad "future-oriented" industries, Uplift Central Coast sought to leverage the area's strengths in pursuit of a sustainable and inclusive economy.

This data portrait provides insights on racial equity, economic inclusivity, and environmental justice to support community and labor groups engaged in the California Jobs First program. These indicators, along with additional indicators on the [National Equity Atlas](#), can be used to inform planning for projects that would address the impacts of the state's historical exclusion of low-income communities and communities of color from economic development planning processes and economic opportunities.



Introduction

Defining an Equitable Region

Regions are equitable when all residents — regardless of their race/ethnicity, nativity, gender, income, neighborhood of residence, or other characteristics — are fully able to participate in the region's economic vitality, contribute to the region's readiness for the future, and connect to the region's assets and resources.

Strong, equitable regions:

- Have **economic vitality** that supports residents to secure high-quality jobs and to produce new ideas, products, businesses, and economic activity so the well-being of the residents is sustainable.
- Are **ready for the future**, with a skilled, ready workforce and a healthy population.
- Are **places of connection**, where residents can access the essential ingredients to live healthy and productive lives in their neighborhoods, reach opportunities located throughout the region (and beyond) via transportation and technology, participate in civic processes, and productively engage with other diverse residents.

Introduction

Data Summary

This data snapshot of the Central Coast region is a resource for community and labor organizations engaged in the California Jobs First program to understand key demographic, social, and economic trends in the region. The data in this profile reveals that:

While much of the Central Coast region remains rural and low-density, Latinx residents have driven population growth across the region in the last few decades.

- Many of the Central Coast's 2.3 million residents live in a string of oceanside population clusters dispersed across the region: the Monterey Bay area, the winemaking areas between San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties, and the cities in Ventura County abutting the westernmost edges of the Los Angeles metro area. However, much of the region's footprint includes agricultural land, mountainous, and forested areas, including

two national parks (Pinnacles and Channel Islands), Los Padres National Forest, and multiple state parks. Plans for economic development and growth must balance the needs and requirements for ecological preservation and climate resiliency, especially with large portions of the region under federal and state management.

- The regional economy leans heavily on agriculture and tourism, which means that many workers are employed in low-wage occupations like farm labor, hospitality, and food services. Unlike California's metropolitan centers, white-collar industries like finance, insurance, real estate, business management, and STEM make up a smaller portion of local jobs. While white residents have declined in number over the past several decades, white workers continue to be disproportionately represented in the region's white-collar workforce.



Introduction

Data Summary (*continued*)

- Between 1990 and 2020, the Central Coast region lost around 175,000 white residents while the total population grew by nearly half a million residents. Latinx community members accounted for two-thirds (69 percent) of population growth during these three decades, with US-born Latinxs accounting for nearly half (48 percent) of all new residents during this period. Nonetheless, the regional population continues to have a higher share of white residents than the statewide population (47 percent vs. 36 percent), with smaller proportions of Asian American and Black residents.

Equitable recovery and economic growth efforts must address the needs of the many local workers in essential low-wage industries, especially as income inequality has worsened in recent decades.

- Between 1980 and 2020, workers at the uppermost percentiles of the wage distribution saw their incomes increase, while most workers making median wages or less saw a decline in their wages when adjusting for inflation. In other words, the highest earners in the region have become richer, while *all* workers at the bottom face steeper struggles in making ends meet.
- The more densely populated areas of the region (Monterey Bay, the area around San Luis Obispo, and Ventura County) also represent the majority of neighborhoods with higher median household incomes, but these regions also include neighboring low-income and high-income communities. More urbanized areas with large Latinx populations also correspond to areas with low median incomes.
- Areas with high unemployment and high poverty are dispersed throughout the

region, but these areas do not always overlap. For instance, in some agricultural areas like the Salinas Valley, there is an abundance of fully employed workers who do not earn living wages. Despite the prevalence of low-income Latinx residents, however, Latinx residents are less likely than other communities in the region to live in neighborhoods with high levels of poverty, which suggests that Latinx poverty might be widely dispersed across low-density areas of the region.

- Many jobs in the region with living wages and sustainable futures require a four-year degree, and, conversely, good employment opportunities are limited for residents with an associate's degree or high school diploma. While educational attainment levels are in line with statewide averages, Black and Latinx adults are far less likely to have a bachelor's degree compared to

Introduction

Data Summary (*continued*)

white and Asian American residents, which leads to the underrepresentation of many workers of color in the region's better-paying jobs.

- However, white workers are also overrepresented in good jobs at every single level of educational attainment. This trend means that there are broader challenges in employment inequity than just disparate access to four-year college degrees. Local leaders and employers must ensure that workers have fair access to the best-paying and most durable jobs and prevent employer discrimination at all levels of skill and education.

As the region diversifies, local leaders must address the region's long-standing racial income gap.

- While poverty rates have fallen for many communities of color in the past 30 years,

overall poverty rates rose over the same period, as did the percentage of working poor residents (the share of residents employed full time, but with a household income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level). In 2020, Latinx residents were almost twice as likely to live below the federal poverty level as white residents (14 percent vs. 8 percent), and they were five times as likely as white residents to experience working poverty (15 percent vs. 3 percent).

- Racial income gaps persist across the region. In 2020, the median Latinx wage-earner made 54 cents for every dollar that the median white wage-earner made. Latinx and Asian American workers are underpaid relative to white workers with the same level of education.
- Workers of color make up an outsized share of many of the region's major

industries with limited access to living wages, such as agriculture, transportation and warehousing, and hospitality and food services. However, residents of color and Latinx residents in particular are underrepresented in some of the region's other major industries, like education and healthcare. Assuming the region continues to become more racially diverse, all workers must receive equitable opportunities in the region's different industries, while also raising the overall well-being of the many agricultural and tourism industry workers who are so central to the region's economic pillars.

Introduction

General Discussion Questions

Inclusive Decision-Making

- Are the communities most deeply impacted by poverty and historic marginalization in your region *meaningfully engaged* in initiatives, priorities, and outcomes? How?
- Do the communities most deeply impacted by poverty and historic marginalization have any decision-making power to shape investments that can affect their future? In what way?

Targeted and Disaggregated Analysis

- What populations or communities aren't reflected in this data profile?
- Given how you plan to analyze economic vitality, connectedness, and readiness in your region, what are the most pressing inequities or disparities that you can isolate for further analysis? How will you perform this analysis to center the needs and priorities of frontline or deeply impacted communities?

California Jobs First represents a generational opportunity for California's regions to advance economic strategies anchored in racial equity, economic inclusivity, and environmental sustainability.



Demographics

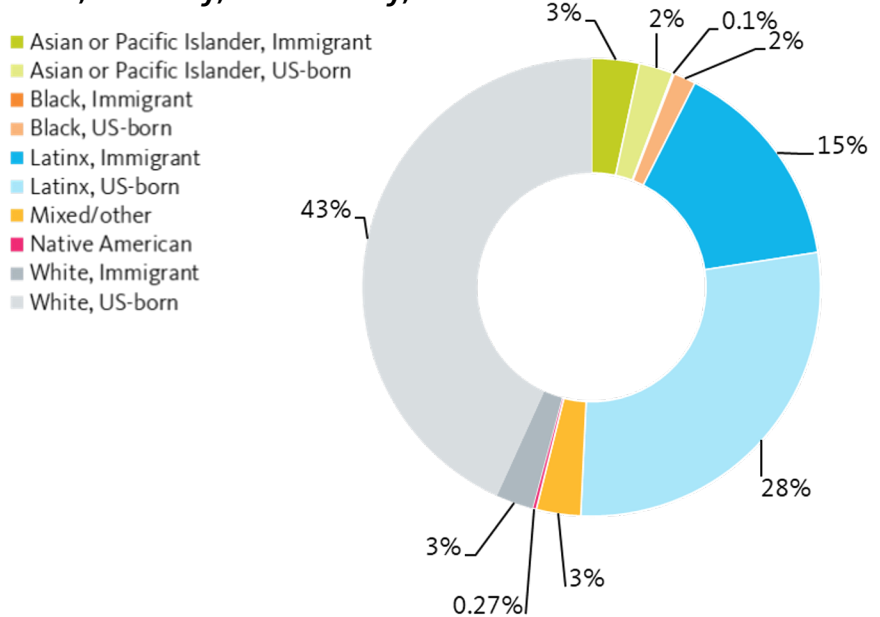
Demographics

Who lives in the region and how is this changing?

Residents of color comprise the majority of the regional population, with a sizeable Latinx presence.

Nearly half (46 percent) of all residents across the Central Coast region are white, [compared to 36 percent of residents statewide](#). Latinx residents comprise the second largest group (43 percent), whereas the Asian American/Pacific Islander (5 percent) and Black populations (2 percent) are smaller relative to statewide totals (15 percent and 5 percent, respectively). Over a quarter (27 percent) of the region's residents are immigrants, similar to the state overall, but Latinx residents account for a comparatively larger share of the immigrant population in the Central Coast, while AAPI immigrants make up a much smaller proportion. The majority of census tracts in the Central Coast region are majority white, except for a few areas with Latinx majorities across the region: Watsonville and the Salinas Valley, much of Santa Maria and the smaller communities west of the city, Oxnard, and northern Ventura County.

Race, Ethnicity, and Nativity, 2020



Source: National Equity Atlas analysis of 2020 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Data for 2020 represent a 2016 through 2020 average.

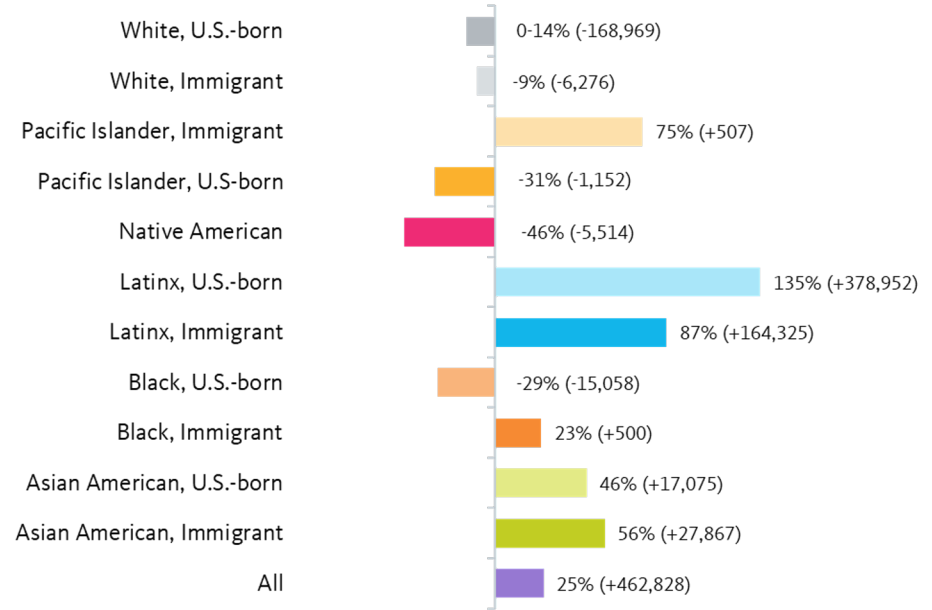
Demographics

Who lives in the region and how is this changing?

Latinx residents accounted for the majority of the region's population growth between 1990 and 2020.

Between 1990 and 2020, the population in the Central Coast region grew by 25 percent, an increase of nearly half a million new residents. This was slower than the statewide population growth of 32 percent over the same period. The region's white population declined by 175,000 residents across the region over this time, which was in turn offset by a net gain of nearly 550,000 Latinx residents. Nearly half (48 percent) of all new residents in the past 30 years have been Latinx people born in the US, with Latinx immigrants accounting for an additional 21 percent of newcomers. Unlike in California's major metro areas, the Asian American population growth was a small fraction of new residents in the past 30 years, and there were also small net declines in the Pacific Islander, Native American, and US-born Black populations.

Change in Major Groups by Race/Ethnicity and Nativity, 1990 to 2020



Source: National Equity Atlas analysis of 2020 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Data for 2020 represent a 2016 through 2020 average.

Demographics

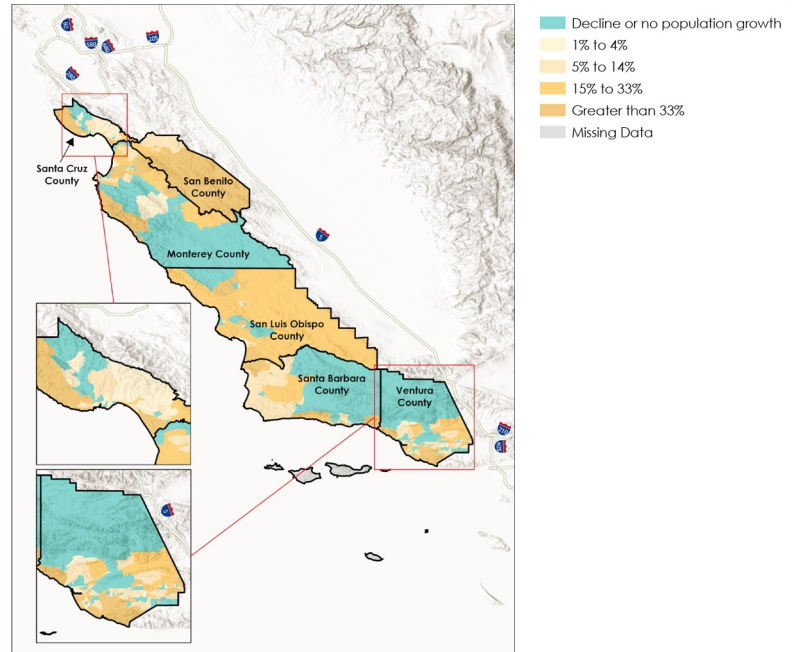
Who lives in the region and how is this changing?

Communities across the region witnessed accelerated population growth between 2000 and 2020, including several areas outside of the major population centers.

Much of the Central Coast region is agricultural or mountainous, and thus it's a very low-density area compared to California's metropolitan hubs. A majority of the regional population lives in small- and medium-sized cities concentrated in three areas: the Monterey Bay to the north; a string of communities between San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara; and the cities west of Los Angeles's San Fernando Valley (Oxnard, Ventura, Thousand Oaks, Simi Valley, and Camarillo). Notably, these areas are also home to the region's two University of California campuses (Santa Cruz and Santa Barbara) and three California State University schools (Monterey Bay, San Luis Obispo, and Channel Islands).

However, these urbanized areas are not the only parts of the region that have witnessed high population growth rates in the past two decades. Parts of San Benito and San Luis Obispo Counties with low densities are among the census tracts that have grown by upward of 15 percent since 2000. By contrast, areas with zero or negative population growth largely correspond to federally and state-protected natural areas, like the Santa Cruz Mountains, Big Sur State Park, and Los Padres National Forest.

Population Growth by Census Tract, 2000 - 2020



Source: National Equity Atlas Analysis of 2020 ACS Summary File Data. Note: Data for 2020 represent a 2016 through 2020 average.

Demographics

Further Data Exploration and Discussion Questions

- What potential impacts may a growing population have across the region?
- What areas of the region have become more racially diverse, especially as the number of white residents has declined in recent decades?
- What areas have high concentrations of linguistically isolated residents, or communities that are otherwise hard to reach?
- What impact will investments and potential projects have on the region's growing racial and ethnic diverse population?
- How have local governments and business leaders responded to incorporate residents of color, especially Latinx residents, into the workforce and community?
- Considering the large, low-density region, how can sub-regional strategies advance an equitable and sustainable economy for the entire Central Coast? How can local leaders support these strategies and sure all constituents are engaged?

Regions are equitable when all residents — regardless of their race/ethnicity, nativity, gender, income, neighborhood of residence, or other characteristics — are fully able to participate in the region's economic vitality, contribute to the region's readiness for the future, and connect to the region's assets and resources.

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Economic Vitality

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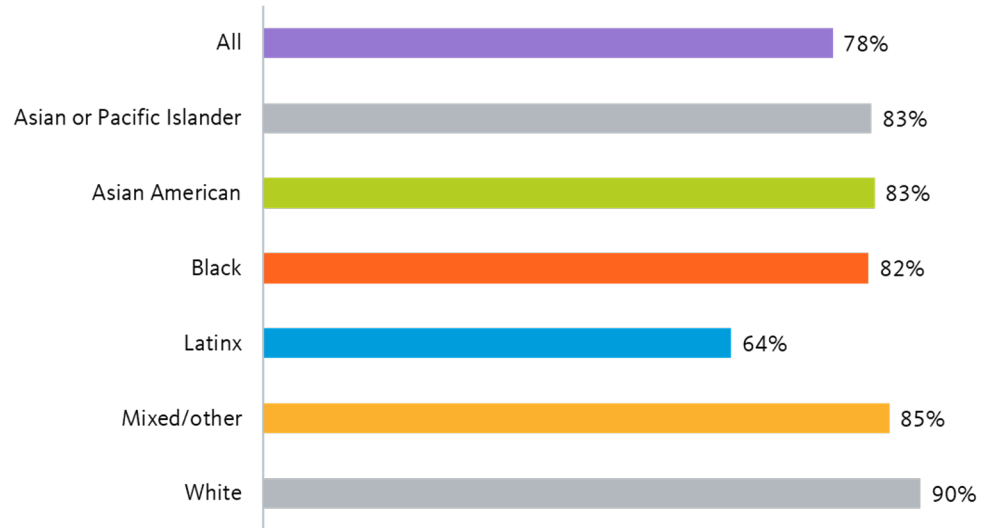
Economic Vitality

Do all workers earn a livable wage?

Fewer than two-thirds of Latinx workers made at least \$15/ hour in 2020, compared to nine-tenths of white workers.

About one in five workers in the Central Coast region earned less than \$15/hour in 2020, in line with the [statewide average for all residents](#). However, there is a larger income gap between white workers (90 percent made more than \$15/hour in 2020) and Latinx workers (64 percent), as well as between Latinx workers and other workers of color: roughly five in six Black, AAPI, and mixed/other workers made more than \$15/hour. The income gap between Latinx workers and other workers of color is a statewide trend, but a higher share of Black and AAPI workers in the Central Coast earn at least \$15/hour than their counterparts statewide, making the local gap more pronounced.

Percent of Workers Earning at least \$15/hour by Race/Ethnicity, 2020



Source: National Equity Atlas analysis of 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Universe includes the civilian noninstitutionalized labor force ages 25 through 64 years. Note: Data for 2020 represent a 2016 through 2020 average.

Economic Vitality

Is the median hourly wage increasing for all workers?

Between 1980 and 2020, the region experienced a worsening wage gap between Latinx workers and other residents, particularly white and Asian American workers.

The median-wage worker in the Central Coast region has not benefited from California’s immense economic growth over the past 40 years. After adjusting for inflation, the median hourly wages for all workers across the region decreased by a dollar between 1980 and 2020. However, economic gains during this period were unevenly distributed. Asian American, Black, and white workers all experienced a rise in median hourly wages, with Asian American workers experiencing the largest increase at 41 percent. Meanwhile, Latinx workers — who make up the largest population of color, and who already had the lowest median wage in 1980 — had a \$2 decline in median hourly wages. In 2020, the median Latinx worker made 61 cents for every dollar that the median white worker earned. This growing wage disparity between Latinx workers and other residents is a major challenge in advancing equity across the region.

Median Hourly Wage by Race/Ethnicity, 1980 to 2020



Source: National Equity Atlas analysis of 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Universe includes civilian noninstitutional full-time wage and salary workers ages 25 through 64 years. Note: Data for 2020 represent a 2016 - 2020 average. Values are in 2020 dollars.

Economic Vitality

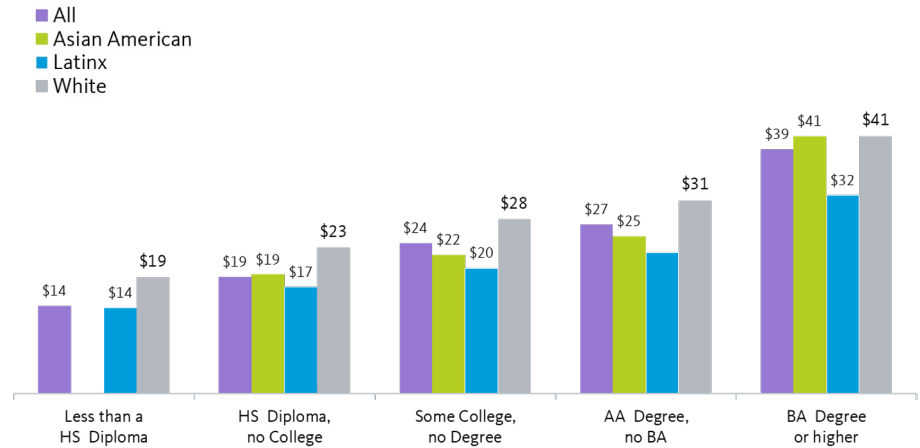
Do racial economic gaps persist across educational levels?

White workers have a higher median wage than Asian American and Latinx workers at nearly all levels of educational attainment.

Median wages for workers in the Central Coast region increase with educational attainment. Workers with a high school diploma have a median wage of less than half (49 percent) of the median wage for workers with a bachelor's degree or higher; workers with a two-year degree earn about two-thirds (69 percent) the median wage of four-year degree holders.

Moreover, there are racial disparities in median earnings at every level of educational attainment in the region: Latinx workers at all levels have a median wage of 70 to 80 percent of median wages for white workers with the same education, and Asian American workers' wages are only on par with white workers for residents with at least a four-year degree. Residents at all levels of education must have opportunities to earn a living wage, while also closing income gaps between white workers and workers of color across the board.

Median Wage by Race/Ethnicity and Educational Attainment, 2020



Source: National Equity Atlas analysis of 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Universe includes civilian noninstitutional full-time wage and salary workers ages 25 through 64 years. Note: Data for 2020 represent a 2016 through 2020 average. Values are in 2020 dollars.

Note: There is not enough data to display on median wages for Asian American workers with less than a high school diploma, nor Black, Native American, and Pacific Islander workers at any level of education.

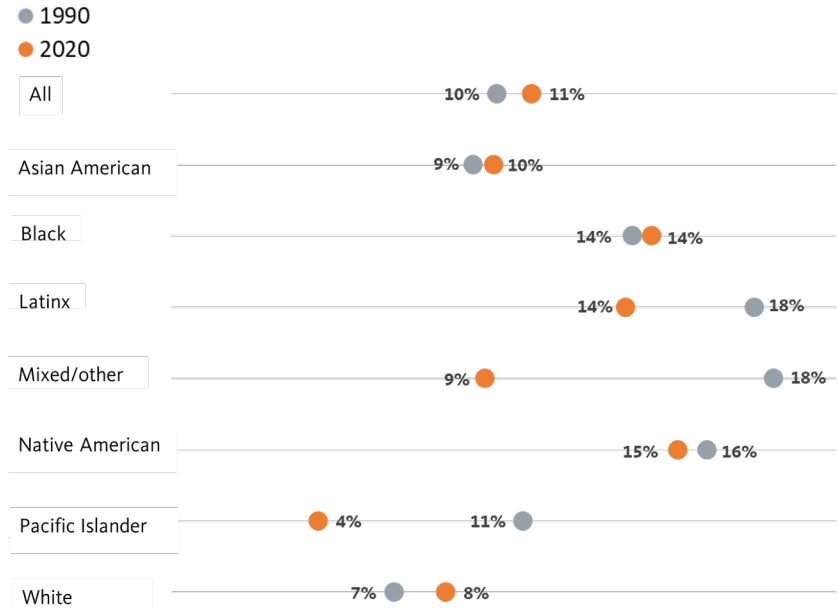
Economic Vitality

Is poverty low and decreasing?

Poverty rates have increased slightly overall since 1990, while they've declined for Latinx, multiracial/other, Native American, and Pacific Islander residents.

Economic insecurity in the Central Coast has risen slightly between 1990 and 2020 with the share of residents living below the poverty level growing from 10 percent to 11 percent. Notably, over the same period the poverty rates dropped substantially for Latinx (18 percent to 14 percent), Pacific Islander (11 percent to 4 percent), and multiracial or “other” (18 percent to 9 percent) residents, and they decreased slightly for Native Americans (16 percent to 15 percent). However, these declines were offset by a slight rise in poverty rates for white residents (7 percent to 8 percent), whose large population numbers helped to drive the overall increase in poverty. However, in 2020 Latinx, Black, and Native American residents were still almost twice as likely as white residents to live in poverty (14 percent to 15 percent, vs. 8 percent). For context, the federal poverty level in 2020 was \$13,171 for an individual working adult with no children (the equivalent of \$6.33/hour working full time) and \$26,246 for a family of four with two working adults and two children.

Poverty Rate by Race/Ethnicity, 1990 and 2020



Source: National Equity Atlas analysis of 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Universe includes all persons for whom poverty is determined. Note: Data for 2020 represent a 2016 through 2020 average.

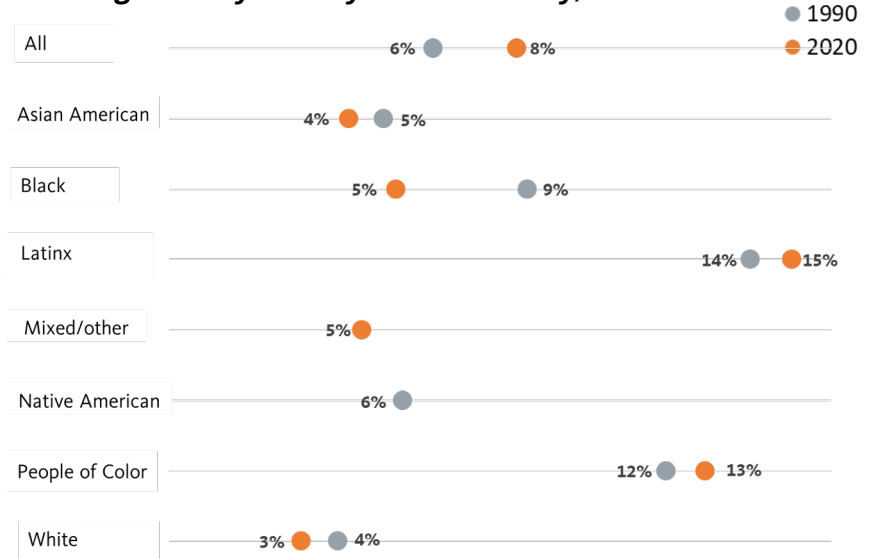
Economic Vitality

Is the share of workers who work full time and have incomes below poverty low and decreasing?

Working poverty rates have increased overall since 1990, while they've declined for Asian American, Black, and white residents.

Across California, there has been an increasing share of workers — particularly workers of color — who are working full-time yet continue to earn poverty wages. Here, we define “working poverty” as those working full-time with family incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Like the regional poverty rate, the rate of working poor residents also increased slightly between 1990 and 2020, from 6 percent to 8 percent. However, the trends vary by race. Asian American, Black, and white residents all experienced a slight increase in the poverty rate and a slight decrease in the working poverty rate, which could indicate growing income disparity in those communities. Meanwhile, the working poverty rate increased for Latinx workers despite a drop in the overall poverty rate. In 2020, Latinx residents were five times as likely as white residents to experience working poverty (15 percent vs. 3 percent).

Working-Poverty Rate by Race/Ethnicity, 1990 and 2020



Source: National Equity Atlas analysis of 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Universe includes the civilian noninstitutional population ages 25 through 64 years not living in group quarters who worked at all during the year prior to the survey. Note: Data for 2020 represent a 2016 through 2020 average. Data for some racial/ethnic groups are excluded due to small sample sizes. Note: There is not enough reliable data to display for Native American residents in 2020.

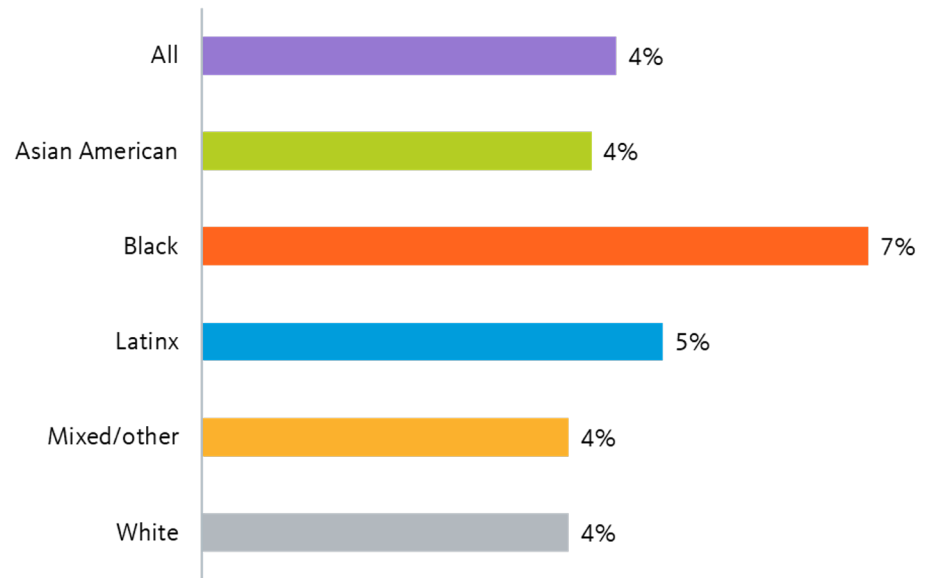
Economic Vitality

Can all residents access employment?

Black workers had the highest unemployment rate relative to other racial/ethnic groups in the region.

The region's unemployment rate was 4 percent, below the statewide average of 5 percent in 2020. However, there is a racial gap in unemployment across the Central Coast region: 4 percent of white workers were unemployed compared to 7 percent of Black adults and 5 percent of Latinx adults. These unemployment rates predate the Covid-19 pandemic and do not reflect the spike in unemployment in the spring and summer of 2020.

Unemployment Rate by Race/Ethnicity, 2020



Source: National Equity Atlas analysis of 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Universe includes the civilian noninstitutionalized labor force ages 25 through 64 years. Note: Data for 2020 represent a 2016 through 2020 average.

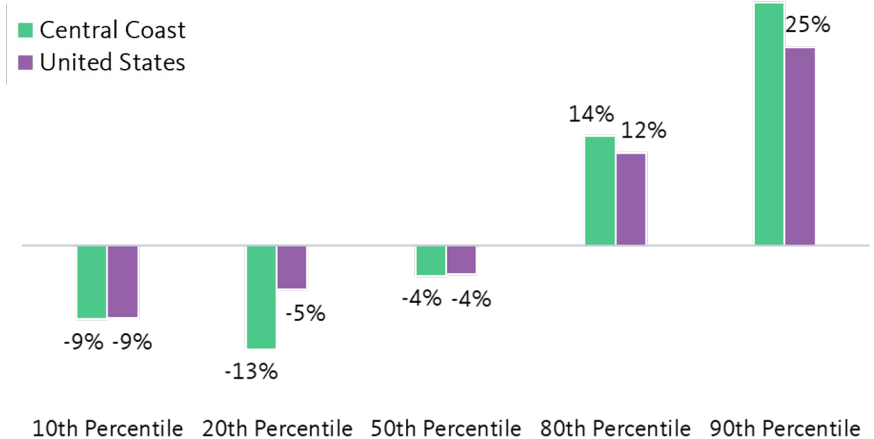
Economic Vitality

Are incomes increasing for all workers?

Growth in earnings over the last 40 years has disproportionately benefited high-wage earners, while it's declined for workers in the bottom half of the wage distribution.

The Central Coast region, like the nation overall, has seen a stark increase in income inequality since 1980, as earnings have increased for the highest-wage workers while decreasing for workers with lower wages. Median wages in the region dropped by 4 percent between 1980 and 2020, while wages of workers at the top have increased by 31 percent. During this period, workers at the 10th percentile of wages earned 9 percent less. Any economic recovery efforts in the region should consider the effects of growing income inequality on the opportunities available for working families, as the worsening disparity across the region was underway long before the onset of Covid-19.

Real Earned Income Growth for Full-Time Wage and Salary Workers Ages 25–64 Years, 1980 to 2020



Source: National Equity Atlas analysis of 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Universe includes civilian noninstitutional full-time wage and salary workers ages 25 through 64. Note: Data for 2020 represent a 2016 through 2020 average. Growth rates are adjusted for inflation.

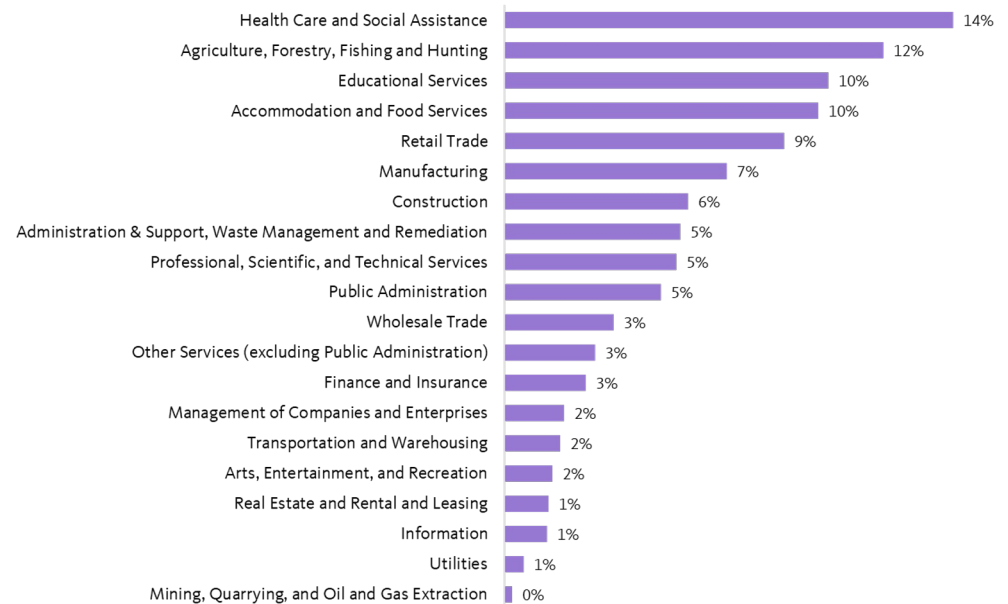
Economic Vitality

Which industries employ the most workers?

Five industries employ more than half of all workers in the Central Coast region.

A substantial proportion of jobs in the Central Coast region fulfill three core pillars of the local economy: grow, distribute, and sell produce; operate the tourism industry along the coast and in wine-growing regions; and provide core services and goods to the region’s residents. As such, just five industries — health care and social assistance, agriculture and forestry, educational services, accommodation and food services, and retail trade — account for 55 percent of all regional jobs. Many of these jobs were “[essential](#)” jobs early in the pandemic, and many more service workers reliant on tourists faced financial fallouts during the shelter-in-place period. White-collar jobs in business management, STEM, finance, real estate, and information, while abundant in California’s coastal metropolises, are few in the Central Coast region. An equitable recovery plan should emphasize the well-being of residents in service and agricultural occupations in addition to investing in new, climate-resilient jobs.

Share of Workers by Industry, 2020



Source: US Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (Beginning of Quarter Employment, 2nd Quarter of 2020).

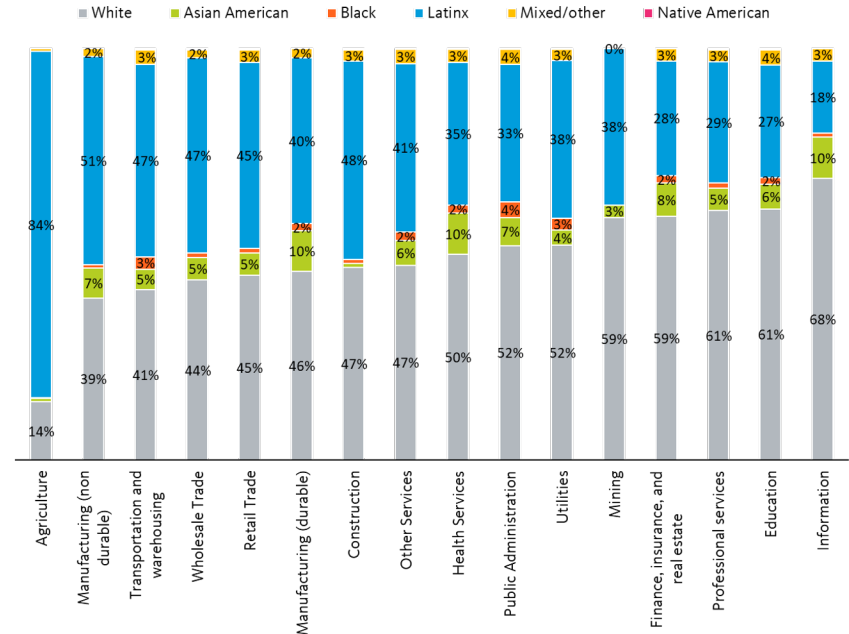
Economic Vitality

Which industries employ the most workers of color?

Latinx workers make up the vast majority of the local agricultural workforce, and they're underrepresented in white-collar jobs.

Latinx residents make up slightly under half (44 percent) of working-age Central Coast residents, but over five in every six of the region's agricultural workers is Latinx. Latinx workers are also disproportionately represented in other manual and low-wage trades like non-durable manufacturing (51 percent of all workers) and transportation and warehousing (47 percent). Conversely, Latinx workers are underrepresented in some of the region's other prominent industries, like education (27 percent of all workers) and health care (35 percent), as well as jobs in typically high-wage industries like finance, insurance, and real estate (28 percent) and information (18 percent). Workers in farming, goods production, and transportation need strong labor protections, living wages, and healthcare. Given the demographics of the region, it is important that workers in healthcare, education, and supportive services can engage and serve an increasingly diverse population that includes immigrant and linguistically isolated residents.

Industry by Race/Ethnicity, 2020



Source: National Equity Atlas analysis of 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Universe includes the civilian, noninstitutional labor force ages 25 through 64 years. Note: Data for 2020 represent a 2016 through 2020 average. Data for some racial/ethnic groups are excluded due to small sample size.

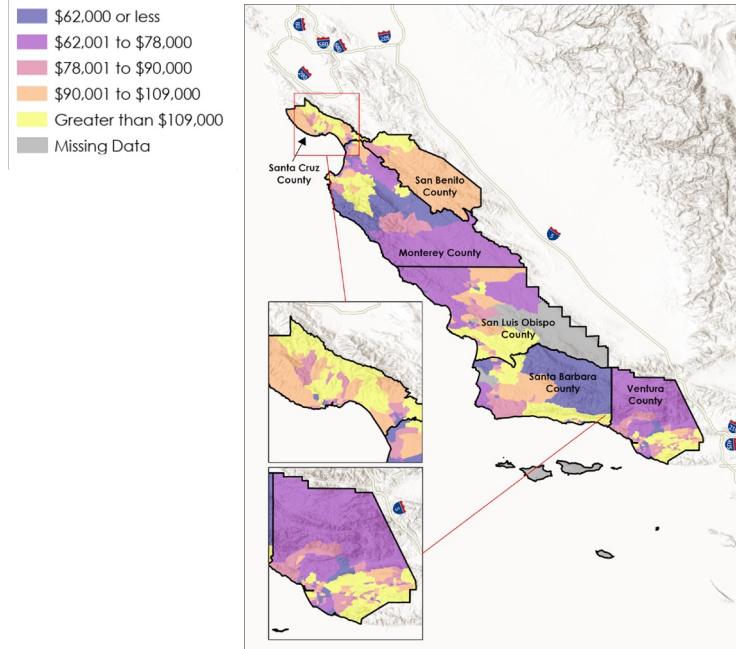
Economic Vitality

Do all workers across the region earn a living wage?

The denser population centers in the northern and southern ends of the Central Coast region generally have higher median household incomes.

Median household incomes vary widely across the Central Coast region, and all counties except San Benito have low-income and high-income neighborhoods adjacent to one another. In general, the areas with higher median incomes are in the region's major population clusters: around Monterey Bay to the north, the winemaking region between San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara County, and the southern edge of Ventura County adjacent to Malibu and the Santa Monica Mountains. Conversely, the lower-density and more rural areas in the region generally have lower median incomes. However, income inequality is also found in more urbanized areas, as seen in the low-income census tracts around Salinas, the west side of Santa Maria, and Oxnard — all of which lie next to wealthier neighborhoods. These lower-income areas are also areas with large concentrations of Latinx residents.

Median Household Income by Census Tract, 2020



Source: National Equity Atlas Analysis of 2020 ACS Summary File Data. Note: Data for 2020 represent a 2016 through 2020 average.

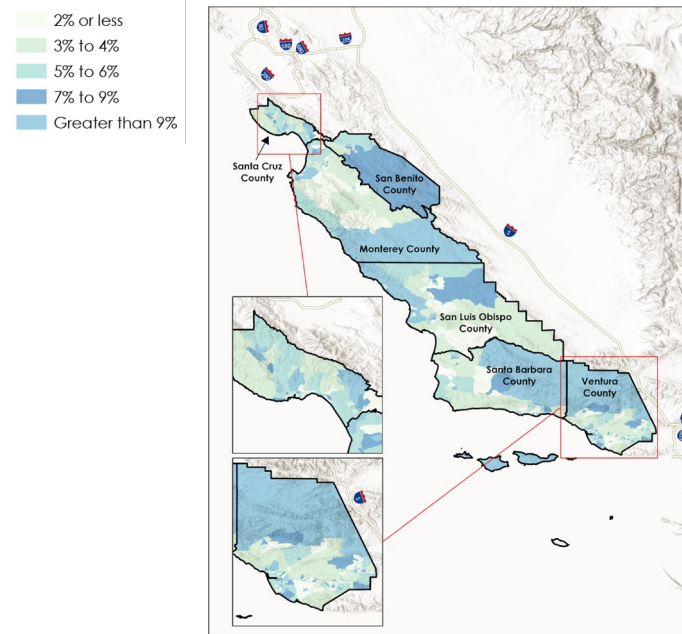
Economic Vitality

How does unemployment vary across the region?

Unemployment rates are higher in less populous areas and lower in the region's population centers.

Areas of high unemployment are common throughout the Central Coast region, and no county in 2020 had unemployment levels entirely below the statewide average of 5 percent. Unemployment was particularly acute in many of the rural areas of the region, such as Pinnacles National Park in San Benito County, southern Monterey County, the northern edge of San Luis Obispo County, and Los Padres National Forest in the southernmost counties. Notably, income levels in the Central Coast region do not correlate with unemployment rates. Low-income areas with lots of Latinx residents, like the Salinas Valley, Santa Maria, and southwestern Ventura County, have census tracts with comparatively lower levels of unemployment. This suggests a high proportion of employed workers, albeit in low-wage industries like agriculture and service sector work.

Unemployment Rate by Census Tract, 2020



Source: National Equity Atlas Analysis of 2020 ACS Summary File Data. Note: Universe includes the civilian, noninstitutional labor force ages 25 through 64 years. Data for 2020 represent a 2016 through 2020 average.

Economic Vitality

Further Data Exploration and Discussion Questions

- What is driving poverty in certain parts of the region? Why have poverty rates in parts of the region increased over the last several decades?
- How can local leaders address the region's racial income gap, especially for Latinx workers, as the region becomes more racially diverse?
- Where are the highest-earning jobs located? Who cannot access jobs in those locations, and why?
- How can economic recovery efforts address the broader challenge of there being fewer local jobs in traditionally high-wage industries like finance and STEM, and more jobs with seasonal variance like tourism and agriculture? Are there secondary industries connected to tourism and agriculture that might support high wage jobs?
- How does economic development impact the region's ecologically protected areas, especially in an era of worsening wildfire seasons and drought throughout California?

Equitable regions have economic vitality that supports residents to secure high-quality jobs and to produce new ideas, products, businesses, and economic activity so the well-being of the residents is sustainable.



Connectedness

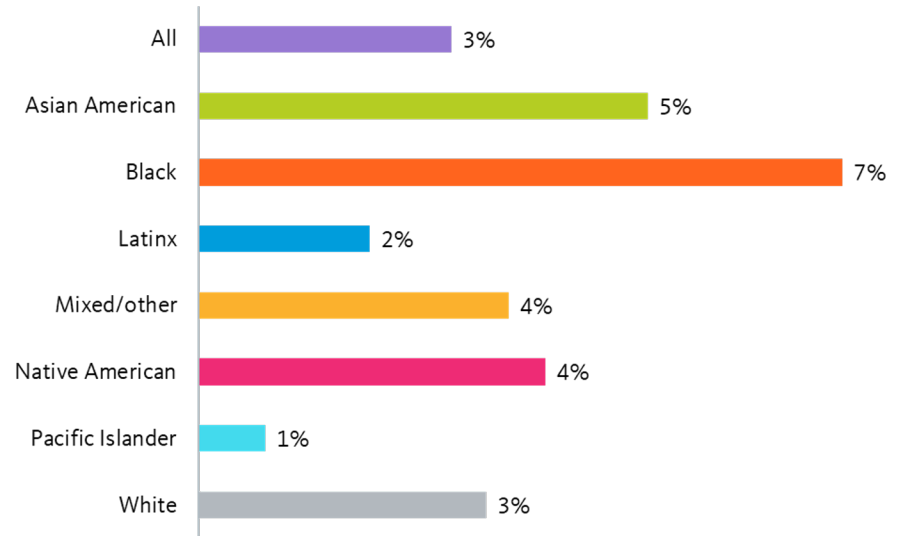
Connectedness

Do residents live in high-opportunity neighborhoods?

Black and Asian American residents experience heightened rates of neighborhood poverty, while Latinx residents experience relatively lower levels.

While comprising a small fraction of the region's overall population, Black and Asian American residents of the Central Coast are more likely to live in neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty. Roughly one in 14 Black residents and one in 20 Asian American residents lives in a neighborhood with high poverty rates (a Census tract where at least 30 percent of residents live in poverty). By comparison, one in 13 white residents and one in 50 Latinx residents live in a high-poverty neighborhood. It is noteworthy that Latinx residents experience some of the lowest neighborhood poverty rates among Central Coast residents, while also having a poverty rate nearly twice the rate for white residents (14 percent and 8 percent, respectively). This could indicate that many low-income Latinx households are widely dispersed across the region, rather than all clustering into the major population centers and thus increasing the neighborhood poverty rate.

Neighborhood Poverty Rate by Race/Ethnicity, 2020



Source: National Equity Atlas analysis of 2020 American Community Survey 5-year Summary File. Universe includes all people. Note: Data represent the percentage of the population living in high-poverty neighborhoods, defined as census tracts with a poverty rate of 30 percent or higher. Data represent a 2016 through 2020 average.

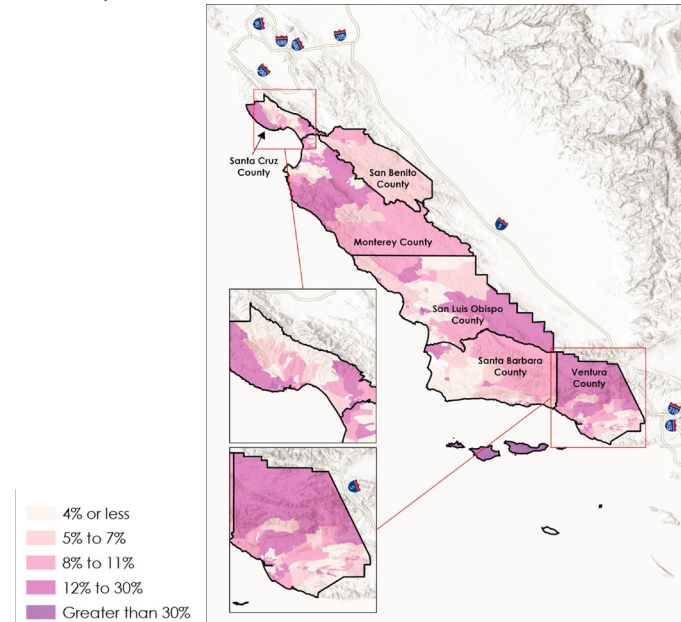
Connectedness

Which neighborhoods have the highest poverty rate?

Poverty rates in the region tend to be higher in areas with fewer residents, and areas with high poverty rates do not always correlate with areas with high unemployment.

Many communities across the Central Coast region struggle with high poverty rates, as only San Benito County has no census tracts with a poverty rate exceeding the statewide average of 12.5 percent. In general, the areas of the region with high median household incomes overlap with the areas with low poverty rates, which are clustered around the region's coastal population hubs. Meanwhile, forested and inland agricultural areas generally have higher levels of poverty, as do more populous, Latinx-heavy areas like Santa Maria and Oxnard. Areas like Santa Maria and the Salinas Valley have low unemployment rates but relatively high poverty levels, demonstrating the rise in working poverty over the past three decades.

Percent of the Population below the Poverty Line by Census Tract, 2020



Source: National Equity Atlas Analysis of 2020 ACS Summary File Data. Note: Data for 2020 represent a 2016 through 2020 average.

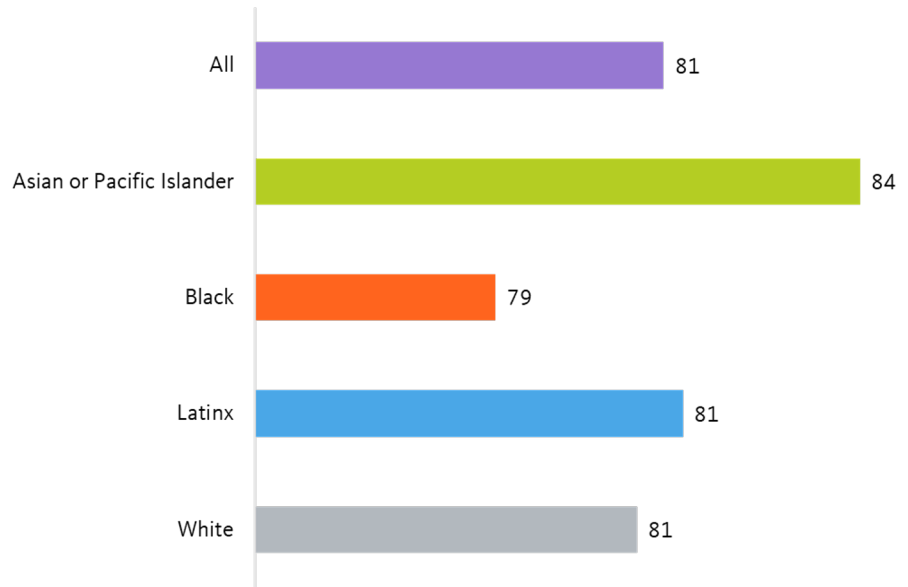
Connectedness

Are all residents able to live a full life?

Black residents have a lower life expectancy than other residents in the region, while Asian American and Pacific Islander residents have a higher life expectancy.

How long a person is expected to live rests on a wide range of social, economic, and political factors that shape a person's environment, opportunities, shelter, food access, healthcare access, and more. The average life expectancy in the Central Coast region is 81, comparable to the statewide average of 80. However, that figure varies across racial groups: the life expectancy for Black residents is five years less than for Asian American and Pacific Islander residents (79 vs. 84). While systemic discrimination and present-day manifestations of oppression and differential access to opportunity have resulted in racial/ethnic gaps in life expectancy in many parts of California, it is notable that the life expectancy for Latinx and white residents are equivalent (81) despite widespread racial income and wealth gaps between the two groups.

Life Expectancy (Years) by Race/Ethnicity, 2020



Source: National Equity Atlas analysis of 2016 through 2020 CDC WONDER from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Data for 2020 represent a 2016 through 2020 average.

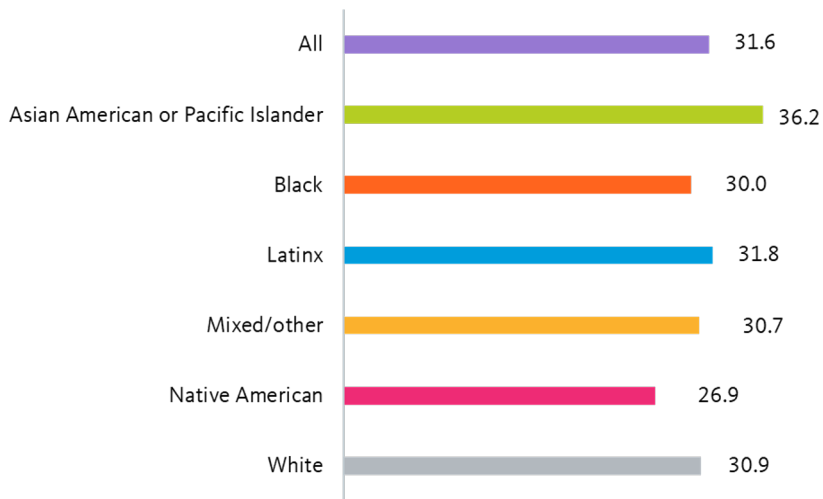
Connectedness

Do all residents have access to clean air?

Air pollution exposure in the Central Coast region is lower than 68 percent of census tracts in the United States overall.

As a coastal region occupied by protected nature areas, air pollution for residents of the Central Coast is lower than for the majority of US residents. The average resident lives in a census tract that is exposed to a level of air pollution higher than just 31.6 percent of census tracts nationwide. Native American residents had lower rates of exposure than the region-wide total (26.9 percent), while Asian American residents were relatively more exposed to air pollution (36.2 percent). Despite widespread disparities in income across the region, white residents are exposed to air pollution at similar levels to Black and Latinx residents.

Air Pollution Exposure Index by Race/Ethnicity, 2020 (air pollution data from 2018)



Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2018 National-Scale Air Toxics Assessment (NATA); U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Decennial Census Summary File 3, 2010 and 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Summary File.

Note: Index of exposure to air toxics for cancer and noncancer risk (combined and separately). Values range from 1 (lowest risk) to 100 (highest risk) on a national scale based on the distribution across census tracts nationwide.

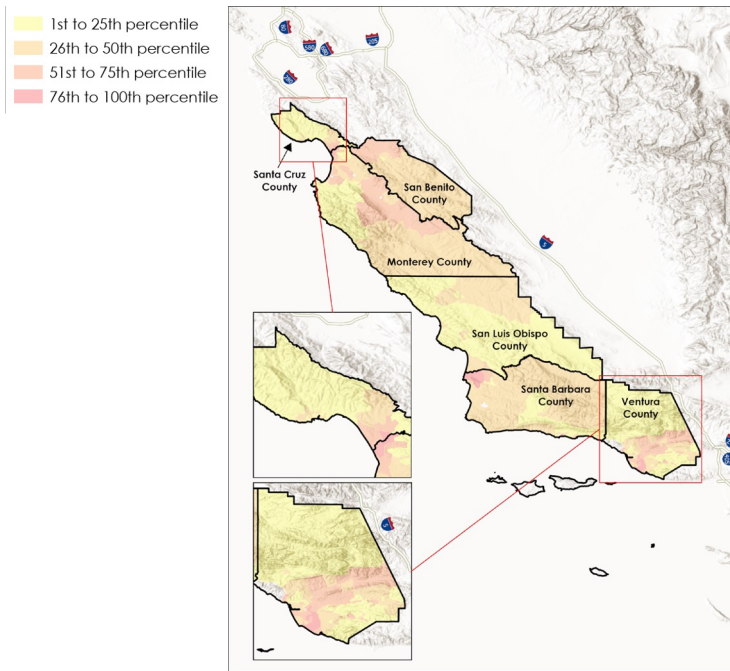
Connectedness

Do all residents live in a clean pollution-free environment?

Much of the Central Coast region experiences below-average levels of environmental and pollution risk.

The [CalEnviroScreen](#) (CES) — a tool developed by the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) and its Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) — maps the impacts of multiple types of pollution and environmental health conditions. The CES designates any census tract scoring in the top quartile of the state (76th to 100th percentile) as a disadvantaged community. Only a handful of communities in the Central Coast region meet these criteria for being disadvantaged: parts of Watsonville and Salinas in the Monterey Bay area, Santa Maria and Guadalupe in Santa Barbara County, and Oxnard and Ventura in Ventura County. Notably, these areas correspond to the region's three population clusters. By contrast, many of the low-density and natural areas of the Central Coast region have some of the lowest percentiles of environmental risk statewide, including much of Santa Cruz and San Luis Obispo Counties.

CalEnviroScreen (CES) Score Percentile by Census Tract, 2021



Source: CalEnviroScreen 4.0, California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, California Environmental Protection Agency. Note: CalEnviroScreen percentiles shown are based on a statewide ranking of census tracts. The top 25 percent of tracts statewide are among those identified as disadvantaged communities under Senate Bill 535.

Connectedness

Further Data Exploration and Discussion Questions

- Who is experiencing the greatest burden of pollution in the region? What, if any, would be the environmental impact of any economic development efforts being proposed?
- What are the major health risks and barriers to longevity that residents in the region face? How can local leaders improve health equity for low-income residents, especially as the population becomes more racially diverse?
- How can local leaders mobilize residents — especially those living in low-density, relatively isolated communities — to work together for the region's future?

Equitable regions are places of connection, where residents can access the essential ingredients to live healthy and productive lives.

Readiness



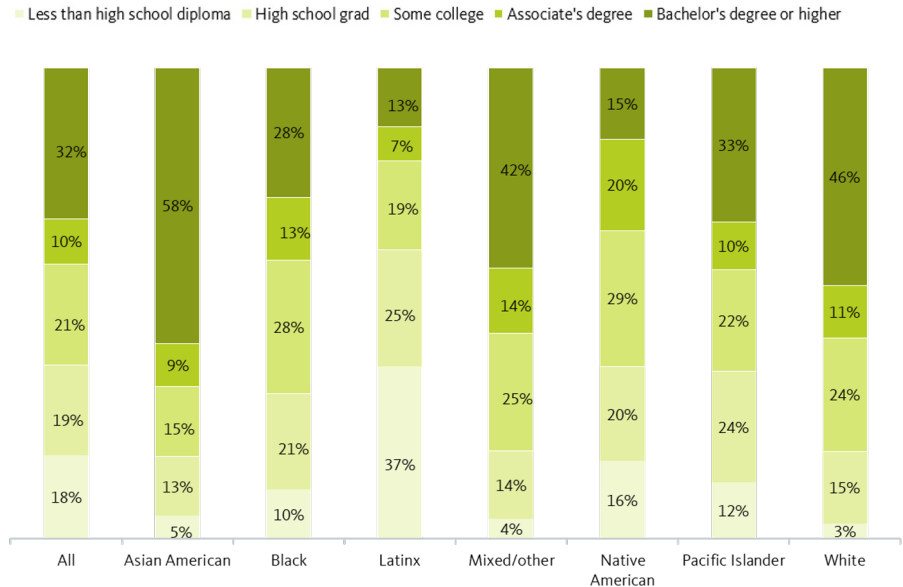
Readiness

How prepared are the region's residents for jobs of the future?

About one in eight Latinx adults in the region has a bachelor's degree, compared to one-third of all adults.

Higher levels of educational attainment are often associated with increased access to economic security through better-paying jobs. Educational attainment in the region is comparable to the statewide totals: just under one-third (32 percent) of adults had a bachelor's degree in 2020, compared to 35 percent of adults statewide. However, the region also experiences racial disparities in educational attainment in line with statewide trends. About one in eight Latinx adults and one in four Black adults in the region has a bachelor's degree, compared to nearly half of white adults and the majority of Asian American adults. With five public universities across the region, there are many different opportunities for local young people to earn a four-year degree while paying tuition for in-state residents.

Educational Attainment by Race/Ethnicity, 2020



Source: National Equity Atlas analysis of 2020 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Universe includes the working-age population ages 25-64. Data for 2020 represent a 2016 through 2020 average.

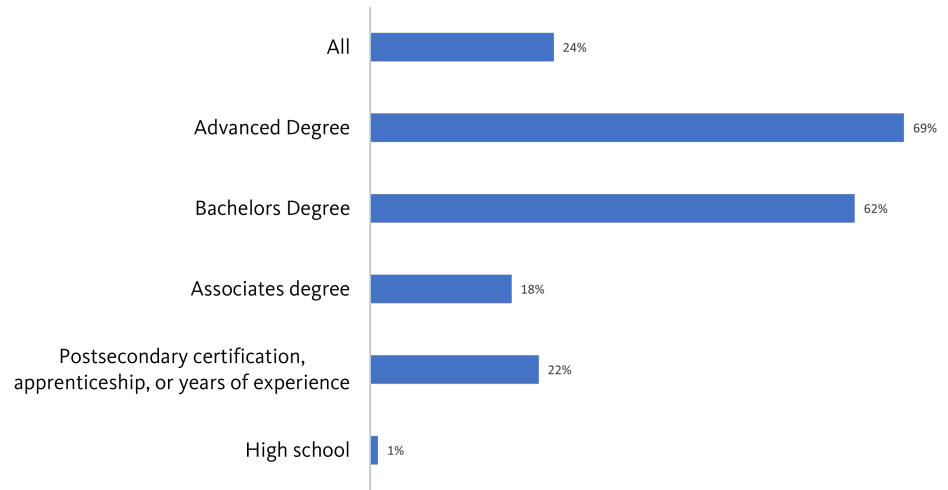
Readiness

How prepared are the region's residents for jobs of the future?

Most workers in the Central Coast region do not have stable jobs with living wages.

Three in four workers in Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties and four in five workers in Monterey County do not have access to “good jobs,” or stable jobs that provide family-sustaining wages and are automation resilient. Having a bachelor’s degree is a significant gateway to accessing such high-quality jobs, as the majority of four-year degree holders have good jobs, compared to one in five associate’s degree holders and just 1 percent of adults with only a high school diploma. Having an advanced degree further increases the likelihood that a worker in the region will have a good job, although in Santa Barbara County workers with advanced degrees have a lower share of “good jobs” compared to workers with just four-year degrees. This means that the regional disparities in educational attainment across racial groups worsen inequitable access to jobs with living wages in automation-resilient industries. Because agriculture and tourism make up critical components of the regional economy, it is crucial that workers in these industries still have access to living wages, even when large proportions of the workforce do not require postsecondary education.

Share of Workers in Good Jobs, Overall and by Educational Requirements, Monterey, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties, 2020



Source: Employment from 2020 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA, and occupational characteristics from Lightcast job posting data and 2020 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA.

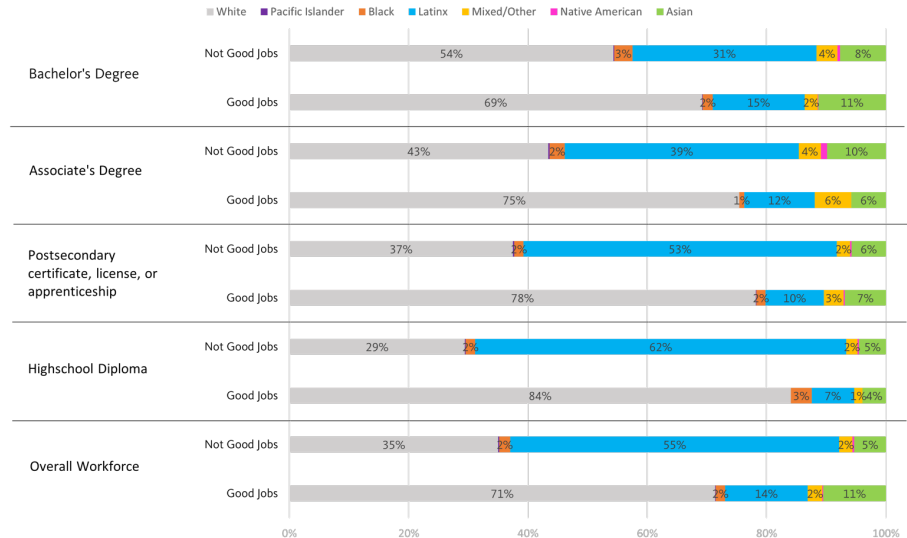
Readiness

How prepared are the region's residents for jobs of the future?

Workers of color are underrepresented in good jobs at every level of educational attainment.

While comprising 43 percent of the Central Coast's working-age population, white workers make up between two-thirds and three-quarters of the good jobs across different parts of the region. When disaggregating workers by the highest level of education, white workers are overrepresented among those with good jobs, while Latinx, Black, and Asian American workers are routinely underrepresented. However, there are some differences in the distribution of good jobs across various parts of the region. In Ventura County, white workers comprise a staggering 97 percent of workers with only a high school diploma in good jobs, whereas, in Monterey County (Salinas), Black workers comprise an outsized share of workers with good jobs and no college education. Nevertheless, trends indicate that racial equity in access to good jobs is a critical priority for local leaders committed to building a more inclusive economy.

Distribution of Workers by Race/Ethnicity, Job Quality, and Educational Requirements, Monterey, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties, 2020



Sources: Employment and worker demographics from 2020 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA, and occupational characteristics from Lightcast job posting data and 2020 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA.

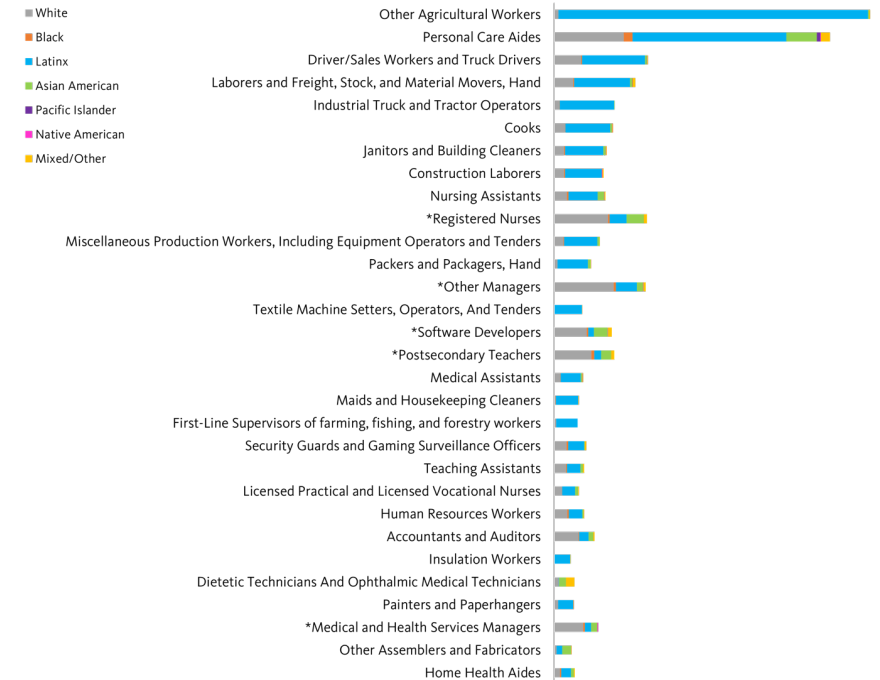
Readiness

How prepared are the region's residents for jobs of the future?

Few of the occupations projected to add the most workers of color are good jobs.

Young people in California are [more racially diverse than prior generations](#), and people of color will represent a greater share of the workforce across all sectors in this decade. Population trends in the Central Coast region over the past few decades demonstrate demographic changes already underway. However, job growth projections indicate that existing racial inequities in employment will persist. Across the region, Latinx workers are projected to form sizeable majorities of new workers in sectors with low pay, long-term job insecurity, and/or poor working conditions. Meanwhile, white and Asian American residents are projected to make up disproportionately high levels of new workers in fields with living wages. Central Coast officials and leaders must take a two-pronged approach: facilitating access to good jobs among historically underrepresented communities while also improving the quality and compensation of historically low-income jobs crucial to the well-being of the region and its residents.

Occupations Projected to Add the Most Workers of Color, by Race/Ethnicity, Monterey, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties, 2020- 2030



Sources: Lightcast modeling for occupational growth and 2020 5-year ACS microdata from IPUMS for demographic characteristics of occupations. Note: Occupations marked with asterisks are classified as good jobs.

Readiness

Further Data Exploration and Discussion Questions

- How can local governments and employers...
 - Ensure that industries supporting the growth and well-being of residents, like healthcare providers and educators, employ workers with the cultural know-how to engage the region's growing communities of color?
 - Work to improve and sustain the well-being of the agricultural and service workers, especially those who are undocumented immigrants, who support some of the region's most valuable industries?
- What does projected job growth look like in the region over the next decade? How can local leaders accommodate the region's growing racial diversity into that job growth and other core priorities for economic development?
- How will climate-conscious economic development in the region impact the longevity of existing industries? How can local leaders ensure equitable access to new jobs among workers in industries that are projected to retract?

Equitable regions are ready for the future, with a skilled, ready workforce and a healthy population.



Data and Methods

National Equity Atlas

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Data and Methods

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Data and Methods

Data Source Summary and Regional Geography

Unless otherwise noted, all the data and analyses presented in this profile are the product of PolicyLink and the USC Equity Research Institute (ERI), and they reflect the Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, California, metropolitan statistical area. The specific data sources are listed in the table displayed on the right-hand side of this page.

While much of the data and analysis presented in this profile are fairly intuitive, in the following pages we describe some of the estimation techniques and adjustments made in creating the underlying database and provide more detail on the terms and methodology used. Finally, the reader should bear in mind that while only a single county is profiled here, many of the analytical choices in generating the underlying data and analyses were made with the intent to replicate the analyses in other counties and regions and to ensure that they could be updated over time. Thus, while more regionally specific data may be available for some indicators, the data in this profile is drawn from our regional equity indicators database, which provides data points that are comparable and replicable over time.

Source	Dataset
Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS)	1980 5% State Sample 1990 5% Sample 2000 5% Sample 2020 American Community Survey, 5-year microdata sample
U.S. Census Bureau	1980 Summary Tape File 1 (STF1) 1980 Summary Tape File 2 (STF2) 1980 Summary Tape File 3 (STF3) 1990 Summary Tape File 2A (STF2A) 1990 Modified Age/Race, Sex and Hispanic Origin File (MARS) 1990 Summary Tape File 4 (STF4) 2000 Summary File 1 (SF1) 2000 Summary File 3 (SF3) 2010 Summary File 1 (SF1) 2010 TIGER/Line Shapefiles, 2010 Census Block Groups 2010 TIGER/Line Shapefiles, 2010 Census Tracts 2010 TIGER/Line Shapefiles, 2010 Counties OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics
Geolytics	1980 Long Form in 2010 Boundaries 1990 Long Form in 2010 Boundaries 2000 Long Form in 2010 Boundaries 2020 Long Form in 2010 Boundaries
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	WONDER Life Expectancy
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	National-Scale Air Toxics Assessment (NATA)
California Office of Environmental Health	CalEnviroScreen 4.0

Data and Methods

Selected Terms and General Notes

Broad Racial/Ethnic Origin

Unless otherwise noted, in every analysis presented, all categorization of people by race/ethnicity and nativity is based on individual responses to various census surveys. All people included in our analysis were first assigned to one of several mutually exclusive racial/ethnic categories, depending on their response to two separate questions on race and Hispanic origin as follows:

- “White” and “non-Hispanic White” are used to refer to all people who identify as white alone and do not identify as being of Hispanic origin.
- “Black” and “African American” are used to refer to all people who identify as Black or African American alone and do not identify as being of Hispanic origin.
- “Latinx” refers to all people who identify as being of Hispanic origin, regardless of racial identification.

- Asian American refers to all people who identify as Asian American alone and do not identify as being of Hispanic origin.
- “Pacific Islander” or “Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander” refer to all people who identify as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander alone and do not identify as being of Hispanic origin.
- “Asian American and Pacific Islander,” “Asian or Pacific Islander,” and “API” are used to refer to all people who identify as Asian American or Pacific Islander alone and do not identify as being of Hispanic origin.
- “Native American” and “Native American and Alaska Native” are used to refer to all people who identify as Native American or Alaskan Native alone and do not identify as being of Hispanic origin.

- “Mixed/other” and “Other or mixed race” are used to refer to all people who identify with a single racial category not included above, or those who identify with multiple racial categories, and do not identify as being of Hispanic origin.
- “People of color” or “POC” is used to refer to all people who do not identify as non-Hispanic white.

Nativity

The term “US-born” refers to all people who identify as being born in the United States (including US territories and outlying areas), or those born abroad to at least one US-citizen parent. The term “immigrant” refers to all people who identify as being born abroad, outside of the United States, to non-US-citizen parents.

Data and Methods

Selected Terms and General Notes (*continued*)

Other Selected Terms

Below we provide definitions and clarification for some of the terms used in the profile.

The term “region” refers to metropolitan areas or other large urban areas (e.g., large cities and counties). The terms “metropolitan area,” “metro area,” and “metro” are used interchangeably to refer to the geographic areas defined as Metropolitan Statistical Areas under the December 2003 definitions of the US Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

The term “neighborhood” is used at various points throughout the profile. In the introductory portion of the profile, this term is meant to be interpreted in the colloquial sense. However, in relation to any data analysis, it refers to census tracts.

The term “communities of color” generally refers to distinct groups defined by

race/ethnicity among people of color.

The term “high school diploma” refers to both an actual high school diploma as well as a high school equivalency or a General Educational Development (GED) certificate.

The term “full-time workers” refers to all persons in the IPUMS microdata who reported working at least 45 or 50 weeks (depending on the year of the data) and who usually worked at least 35 hours per week during the year prior to the survey. A change in the “weeks worked” question in the 2008 American Community Survey (ACS), as compared with prior years of the ACS and the long form of the decennial census, caused a dramatic rise in the share of respondents indicating that they worked at least 50 weeks during the year prior to the survey. To make our data on full-time workers more comparable over time, we applied a slightly

different definition in 2008 and later than in earlier years: in 2008 and later, the “weeks worked” cutoff is at least 50 weeks while in 2007 and earlier it is 45 weeks. The 45-week cutoff was found to produce a national trend in the incidence of full-time work over the 2005-2010 period that was most consistent with that found using data from the March Supplement of the Current Population Survey, which did not experience a change to the relevant survey questions. For more information, visit https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2012/demo/Gottschalck_2012FCSM_VII-B.pdf.

Data and Methods

Selected Terms and General Notes (*continued*)

General Notes on Analyses

Below, we provide some general notes about the analysis conducted.

In relation to monetary measures (e.g., income, earnings, and wages) the term “real” indicates the data has been adjusted for inflation. All inflation adjustments are based on the Consumer Price Index for all Urban Consumers (CPI-U) from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Data and Methods

Summary Measures from IPUMS Microdata

Although a variety of data sources were used, much of our analysis is based on a unique dataset created using microdata samples (i.e., “individual-level” data) from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) for four points in time: 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2016-2020 pooled together. The 1980 through 2000 files are based on the decennial census, which each covering about 5 percent of the US population. The 2016-2020 files are from the ACS, and they cover only about 1 percent of the US population each. The five-year pooled ACS file was used to improve statistical reliability and achieve a sample size that is comparable to that available in previous years.

Compared with the more commonly used census “summary files,” which include a limited set of summary tabulations of population and housing characteristics, the use of the microdata samples allows for the

flexibility to create more illuminating metrics of equity and inclusion. It also provides a more nuanced view of groups defined by age, race/ethnicity, and nativity for various geographies in the United States.

The IPUMS microdata allows for the tabulation of detailed population characteristics, but because such tabulations are based on samples, they are subject to a margin of error and should be regarded as estimates — particularly in smaller regions and for smaller demographic subgroups. In an effort to avoid reporting highly unreliable estimates, we do not report any estimates that are based on a universe of fewer than 100 individual survey respondents.

A key limitation of the IPUMS microdata is geographic detail. Each year of the data has a particular lowest level of geography associated with the individuals included, known as the

Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA) for years 1990 and later, or the County Group in 1980. PUMAs are generally drawn to contain a population of about 100,000. They also vary greatly in geographic size — from being fairly small in densely populated urban areas to very large in rural areas — often with one or more counties contained in a single PUMA.

While the geography of the IPUMS microdata generally poses a challenge for the creation of regional summary measures, this was not the case in this instance, as the geography of the region could be assembled perfectly by combining entire 1980 County Groups and 1990, 2000, and 2010 PUMAs.

Data and Methods

Good Jobs Analysis

The analysis presented here draws from two key data sources: the 2018 five-year American Community Survey (ACS) microdata from IPUMS USA and a proprietary occupation-level dataset from Lightcast (expressed at the six-digit Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) level). While detailed sources and notes are included beneath each figure throughout the report, here we provide additional information on these two key data sources and methods used for the analysis of “good jobs,” automation risk, and income/GDP gains with racial equity in the workforce.

Unless otherwise noted, the ACS microdata is the source of all tabulations of demographic and workforce equity metrics by race/ethnicity and nativity included in this report. In addition, unless otherwise noted, racial/ethnic groups are defined such that all groups are non-Latinx (excluding those who identify as Hispanic or Latinx), leaving all

persons identifying as Hispanic or Latinx in the “Latinx” category. The term “US-born” refers to all people who identify as being born in the United States (including US territories and outlying areas), or those born abroad to at least one US-citizen parent. The term “immigrant” refers to all people who identify as being born abroad, outside of the United States, to non-US-citizen parents.

The ACS microdata was aggregated to the detailed occupation level and merged with data from Lightcast to conduct the “good jobs” and “automation risk” analyses that appear in the report.

The proprietary data from Lightcast is based on job postings by collecting data from close to 50,000 online job boards, newspapers, and employer sites daily. Lightcast then de-duplicates postings for the same job, whether it is posted multiple times on the same site or across multiple sites.

Finally, Lightcast applies detailed text analytics to code the specific jobs, skills, and credentials requested by employers.

The equity gap for good jobs was calculated using occupation characteristics from the ACS (employment and average salary), Lightcast data models (typical education requirements advertised on job postings and metropolitan-area occupational employment projections), and the automation risk associated with each occupation from the Frey and Osborne’s 2013 paper, *The Future of Employment: How Susceptible Are Jobs to Computerisation*.

Data and Methods

Additional Data Resources

[The National Equity Atlas](#): The National Equity Atlas is the most detailed report card on racial and economic equity in the United States. It equips advocates and policymakers with actionable data and strategies to advance racial equity and shared prosperity.

[California Immigrant Data Portal](#): The California Immigrant Data Portal is a resource and progress tracker for immigrants and those serving immigrant communities across the state. It presents data and case studies that can be used to better understand and promote the well-being of immigrants, their families, and their communities.

[Statewide Vulnerability & Recovery Index](#): This index — developed by the California Advancement Project — uses zip code-level data to identify California communities most in need of immediate and long-term pandemic and economic relief. Policymakers and community stakeholders can use it to determine where to target interventions.

[CalEnviroScreen](#): This mapping tool helps identify California communities that are most affected by multiple sources of pollution and where people are often especially vulnerable to pollution's effects.

[California Opportunity Area Maps](#): These maps — created by the Othering & Belonging Institute for the California Tax Credit Allocation Committee (CTCAC) and the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) — measure and visualize place-based characteristics linked to critical life outcomes, such as educational attainment, earnings from employment, and economic mobility. Opportunity maps can be used to inform how to target investments and policies in a way that is conscious of the independent and interrelated effects that research has shown that place — the conditions in communities where people live — has on economic, educational, and health outcomes.

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1438 Webster Street
Suite 303
Oakland, CA 94612
t 510 663-2333
f 510 663-9684

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University of Southern California
1149 South Hill Street
Suite H-340
Los Angeles, CA 90015
t 213 740-3643
f 213 740-5680

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