



AAPI Sub-Ethnic Groups In California



Prepared for the California Asian & Pacific Islander
Legislative Caucus

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The AAPI population makes up approximately 15.5% of California's total population.
- California's AAPI population increased by 25% in the past decade, faster than any other ethnic group in the state.
- The AAPI community is the largest growing minority immigrant group in California.
- 40% of Asian Americans call California their home state.
- Filipino, Chinese, and Vietnamese communities have the highest population concentrations of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.
- Asian immigrants migrated to the U.S. due to various historic events and legislation, which have impacted the disproportion between the AAPI sub-ethnic groups.

SECTION 1 | INTRODUCTION

This report analyzes the sub-ethnic distribution of Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities in California. Statewide, the AAPI population is the fastest-growing ethnic group over the past decade.¹ The AAPI population can be broken down into many sub-ethnic groups, including Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Vietnamese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese, Thai, Cambodian, Indonesian, Pakistani, Burmese, Laotian, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Malaysian, Okinawan, Bhutanese, Mongolian, Nepalese, and Hmong. In the state of California, the Asian American population is predominantly Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Hmong, or Vietnamese.²

AAPI residents make up roughly 15.5% of California's total population, and according to the 2020 U.S. Census data, California's AAPI population grew by 25% in the past decade.³ This growth differed considerably among distinct Asian subgroups. Nepalese residents had the highest surge, tripling in number. Singaporeans, Mongolians, and Bangladeshis followed closely, exhibiting substantial growth rates. While these groups compose only 0.5% of the total Asian Americans in the state, the majority groups, including Chinese and Indian populations, also demonstrated substantial growth. Further data analysis shows distinct patterns in population growth, with several ethnicities facing higher growth rates among those identifying with a single ethnicity. In contrast, others display faster growth in mixed-ethnicity populations. These demographic changes in California align with national trends among Asian Americans, demonstrating the complex intricacies of immigration, cultural factors, and historical influences on population dynamics.

The AAPI ethnic group first experienced waves of migration to the U.S. in light of historical events, particularly the Cold War (1947-1991). In an Oxford research report, historian Madeline Y. Hsu writes that the Cold War's worldwide political tensions played a crucial role in dismantling Asian exclusion, leading to a reconfiguration of racial inequality in the United States after World

¹ <https://www.sfchronicle.com/projects/2023/california-asian-population-growth/>

² <https://www.sfchronicle.com/projects/2022/california-asian-population/>

³ <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/10/17/asian-americans-in-california-results-from-2022-survey-pub-90765#:~:text=AAPI%20residents%20comprise%20roughly%2015.5,ethnic%20group%20in%20the%20state.>

War II. This transformation offered Asian Americans a more substantial, albeit conditional, integration⁴. The war's proxy conflicts across the Pacific led to numerous waves of migration of those impacted by the war, from refugees and asylum seekers to adoptees and soldiers.

SECTION 2 | METHODOLOGIES

Data Collection

Research was conducted for each county within California to determine the county's total population, the AAPI population, and the specific population of AAPI ethnicities. We utilized the 2020 Census data retrieved from the U.S. Census Bureau to obtain the county's total population. Articles from the San Francisco Chronicle were used to examine the AAPI population within counties more closely. The data charts in the article were collected from the U.S. Census Bureau and the National Historical Geographic Information System from the University of Minnesota. Data from the University of Minnesota breaks down the AAPI community into 20 different ethnicities, separated into four sections: East Asian, Southeast Asian, South Asian, and West Asian. The combination of data from the census and the University of Minnesota allowed for more specific research of the most popular AAPI ethnic group within each county and compared between 2010 and 2020.

Much analysis cannot be done because of the need for more data on smaller sub-ethnicity population levels. The lack of census data shows how underserved these communities are or how small they are not to garner enough attention for research.

Defining Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI)

The term Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) refers to a person who resides in the United States and whose family is originally from the Far East, Southeast Asia, or Pacific Island nations.

Note on Identity and Self-Identification

In the data collected and the analysis collected by the United States Census Bureau, the state of California, and the University of Minnesota, there was significant emphasis on the label or ethnic identity of those reporting. Identity was derived by using the labels described by those who, on the Census, responded that they identified as Asian. However, the terms used varied widely.

Some self-identified as one ethnicity (such as from the country they or their family originated). We have included this in our data set, and those individuals will be recognized as the “alone” population for choosing to belong to one group *alone*. Conversely, others identified themselves as one ethnicity in conjunction with at least one other identity, Asian or not. They will be referred to as the “in combination” population for identifying with one Asian background *and* another ethnicity. These might include those of mixed race or mixed ethnic background.

⁴<https://oxfordre.com/americanhistorical/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-44?mediaType=A&article#:~:text=Between%201965%20and%201975%2C%20an,adoptees%20children%2C%20and%206%2C000%20students.>

The decision to distinguish between the “alone” and “in combination” population is not to discredit or divide those of mixed backgrounds from the greater Asian identity. Rather, it is to note that, depending on which population is considered, there may have been a significant percentage of change in demographic distribution between 2010 and 2020 across the state. Increased multicultural identifications may also signal developments or patterns in international relationships and cultural norms.

In the data collected, specific distinctions were made between groups that might otherwise be thought to be the same people. This includes the separation of the Taiwanese from the Chinese and the Okinawan from the Japanese. Taiwan, formally known as the Republic of China, has historically identified itself as separate from China, otherwise known as the People's Republic of China. Those who referred to themselves as Taiwanese rather than Chinese will be listed as such. Okinawa is disconnected geographically from the rest of Japan. This geographic isolation (as well as the prefecture’s past status as an independent nation) has led to a separation of Okinawan identity from that of the larger Japanese population. The indigenous people of the territory, known as the Ryukyuan, are ethnically, culturally, and linguistically distinct from the rest of Japan but are not recognized as an official minority group. To respect this distinction, much of the data referenced will differentiate between those who identified as Okinawan versus Japanese.

SECTION 3 | POPULATION DATA AND STATISTICS

Californian Population of Asians, Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander (NHPI), and Non-NHPI

CA Population

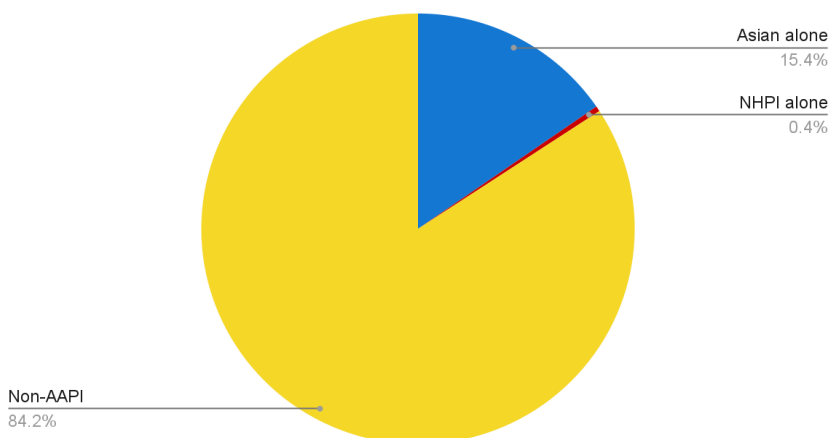


Figure 1. Percentage of California population, highlighting Asian-alone population and NHPI-alone population.

AAPI Population By Country

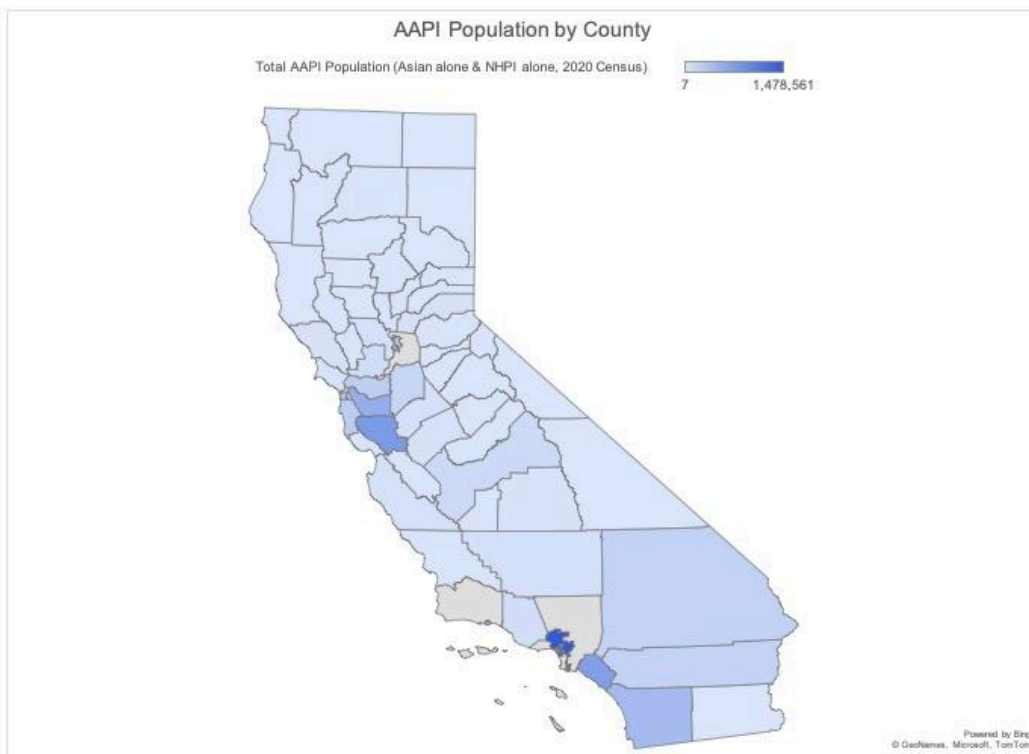


Figure 2. The total population of California is 39 million according to the July 2022 U.S census of which over 6 million are of AAPI descent.

County	AAPI Population	Largest Ethnic Group	Percentage of Largest Ethnic Group by County
Los Angeles	499,302	Chinese	5%
Orange	241,557	Vietnamese	7%
Santa Clara	224,562	Chinese	12%
San Diego	215,168	Filipino	6%
Alameda	201,823	Chinese	12%

Table 1. Five Largest AAPI Concentrations by AAPI Population (2020)⁵

⁵ <https://www.sfchronicle.com/projects/2022/california-asian-population/>

County	AAPI Population	Largest Ethnic Group	Percentage of Largest Ethnic Group by County
Tehama	145	Indian	1%
Mariposa	162	Filipino	1%
Glenn	201	Hmong	1%
Del Norte	257	Filipino	1%
Amador	408	Filipino	1%

Table 2. Five Smallest AAPI Concentrations by AAPI Population from Largest AAPI Ethnic Group (2020)⁶

The first table above lists the five largest AAPI concentrations by AAPI population, while the second table lists the five smallest AAPI concentrations by AAPI population.

SECTION 4 | ANALYSIS

Contemporary Analysis

California continues to be the focal point for Asian American communities, with 40% of Asian Americans calling California their home state.⁷ According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau (San Francisco Chronicle, Oct. 2023), Asian Americans are the fastest-growing minority group in California as of the past decade, making up 17 percent of the residential population. Smaller ethnic groups have seen major increases in population growth.

Notably, Nepalese, Singaporean, and Mongolian ethnic groups have grown between 105% to 216%. The Nepalese American population grew from 9,000 to 59,000 between 2000 and 2010, with U.S. relations of aid, economics specialized for single-country trade policies, and tourism agreements providing access to residency. Additionally, Singaporeans have the fastest growing population as a group of singular ethnicity and with combined ethnicity or mixed-race origins. This growth has hit 139% and is highly attributed to economic and diplomatic friendliness in opportunities between the U.S. and Singapore, as Singapore is the largest trading partner for the U.S. in Southeast Asia.

However, Laotian and Bhutanese populations have reduced rather than grown, decreasing 9% and 41%, respectively. The U.S. Census of 2000 documented 198,203 Laotian Americans, but

⁶ <https://www.sfchronicle.com/projects/2022/california-asian-population/>

⁷ <https://www.california.com/the-history-of-asian-americans-in-california/#:~:text=Nowadays%2C%2040%25%20of%20Asian%20Americans,well%20as%20288%2C000%20Japanese%20Americans.>

today, the Pew Research Center finds that Laotians-Americans make up around 254,000 of the U.S. population.⁸ Bhutanese immigrants are recorded to have 19,000 migrants taking up US residency from 2000-2010, with numbers dramatically slowing to 24,000 recorded for 2015 and 2019. Since Bhutan does not have formal diplomatic ties with the US, and many migrants enter the U.S. through Nepal, the ethnic status of Bhutanese persons deters significantly by quantitative standards.

Thus, nowhere is the demographic significance of Asian Americans more readily apparent than in California.⁹ With California's AAPI population growing by 25% in the past decade,¹⁰ it is clear that Asian Americans are increasingly attracted to California – with many of them having found their home and ethnic community in the state.

Under-served Communities

In 2017, approximately 14% of the 10.5 million unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. were from Asia, with India, China, the Philippines, and Korea among the top 15 countries of birth for these individuals. Asian Americans, despite having a lower overall homeownership rate (59% vs. 64% for the overall U.S. population), experienced an increase from 53% in 2000 to 59% in 2019. Immigrant Asians were slightly more likely than U.S.-born Asians to be homeowners in 2019 (60% vs. 56%). While Asian Americans generally fare well economically compared to the overall U.S. population, there are significant variations among different Asian origin groups. Burmese Americans, for instance, had considerably lower household incomes (\$44,400 vs. \$85,800 overall). Although Asians, on the whole, are less likely to live in poverty than the overall U.S. population (10% vs. 13% in 2019), several Asian origin groups, including Mongolians with the highest poverty rates at 25%, had rates as high as or higher than the U.S. average. Indians had the lowest poverty rate among the analyzed Asian groups at 6%.¹¹

Migration Trends

Aside from conflict and legislation, trends have also significantly impacted the current clustering of AAPI sub-ethnic groups in California, especially the disparity between these groups. The highest concentrations of AAPI individuals by population include Filipino, Chinese, and Vietnamese communities.

Due to the Chinese's long-standing historical influence on California legislation and immigration trends, the Chinese community occupies a large population in several counties, including Los Angeles, Santa Clara, and Alameda. For instance, the Gold Rush of 1849 had 24,000 young men immigrating from China to California over four years.¹²

⁸ <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/fact-sheet/asian-americans-laotians-in-the-u-s>

⁹ <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/10/17/asian-americans-in-california-results-from-2022-survey-pub-90765>

¹⁰ <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/10/17/asian-americans-in-california-results-from-2022-survey-pub-90765>

¹¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>

¹² https://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Chinese_Immigration

Another highly concentrated population is the Filipino community, which occupies many of San Diego County, Solano County, and San Joaquin County. Filipino immigrants came in large numbers during the 1920s and 1930s, majorly migrating as US nationals due to the American colonizations of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War. Because Filipinos were deemed U.S. nationals, they were allowed to travel around the U.S. while circumventing restrictive immigration laws, like the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882.¹³ As a result, Filipinos were extremely sought after to work in sugar plantations in Hawaii and later as vegetable farmers in California.¹⁴ After arriving in San Francisco, most Filipinos went to Stockton to work in the San Joaquin-Sacramento Valley, causing a large percentage of Filipinos to be located in Solano County.¹⁵

The Vietnamese are also another highly concentrated group of AAPI individuals in California. The Fall of Saigon in 1975 marked the end of the Vietnam War, resulting in the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act, which made provisions for 135,000+ Vietnamese and Southeast Asian immigrants for resettlement in the U.S. following the fall of Saigon. As early as the late 1970s, a distinct Vietnamese community began emerging in Orange County as Vietnamese businesses, cultural organizations, and media outlets took root¹⁶. This enclave offered social services, economic opportunities, and a sense of community for new refugees. Over time it attracted additional migration from within California and other states.¹⁷

Fleeing Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War, numerous Hmong individuals were recruited by the U.S. to combat self-proclaimed communist forces. In 1975, many were compelled to escape Laos, and subsequently, the Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act was enacted to grant citizenship to veterans and their families.¹⁸ Many of these communities resettled in Central California, particularly the Fresno area. Between 1975 and 1995, over a million Southeast Asians sought refuge in the U.S., highlighting the widespread impact of displacement during this period.

Not all regions in California were migration destinations. Tehama County is one of five notable counties with a low AAPI presence compared to its population. The county has a history of anti-Chinese attitudes, with hate groups and crimes becoming more and more prevalent in the late 1800's. The discrimination towards Asians, as well as the Chinese Exclusion Act, caused there to be less migration to the area even decades after.¹⁹

¹³<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/blogs/smithsonian-education/2022/10/04/undiscovering-the-hidden-histories-of-californias-filipino-community/#:~:text=By%20the%201940s%2C%20Stockton%20had,prior%20to%20World%20War%20II.>

¹⁴<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/blogs/smithsonian-education/2022/10/04/undiscovering-the-hidden-histories-of-californias-filipino-community/#:~:text=By%20the%201940s%2C%20Stockton%20had,prior%20to%20World%20War%20II.>

¹⁵ [https://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=File:Filipin1\\$filipino-family-1930s.jpg](https://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=File:Filipin1$filipino-family-1930s.jpg)

¹⁶ https://oac.cdlib.org/view?docId=hb8g500803&brand=oac4&doc.view=entire_text

¹⁷ https://oac.cdlib.org/view?docId=hb8g500803&brand=oac4&doc.view=entire_text

¹⁸<https://www.yourcentralvalley.com/news/local-news/how-the-hmong-community-made-the-central-valley-their-home/>

¹⁹ <https://www.calif-tech.com/corning/history/chinese.html>

SECTION 5 | CONCLUSION

Research found that the counties with the most AAPI residents were Los Angeles, Orange, Santa Clara, San Diego, and Alameda. The counties with the smallest populations of the largest sub-ethnic groups include Tehama, Mariposa, Glenn, Del Norte, and Amador. The largest sub-ethnic groups in California were Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Hmong. Despite the lack of community resources, the population of the smaller ethnic groups in California are predicted to continue to increase as of 2020. The research done by APAPA shows that more census data needs to be taken on smaller ethnic groups to determine what type of resources (income, opportunity, safety, representation, and education) they need to thrive.

Over the last century, many persons of Asian and Pacific Islander descent have immigrated to the U.S., mainly California, making AAPIs the largest growing minority immigrant group. Over time, many Asian Americans have been born in the U.S. Therefore, the data is represented based on self-reporting as many of the self-identifying criteria varied. That being said, different sub-ethnic groups in California are more represented and have larger communities than others. Those who immigrated to California mainly settled with those they ethnically identified with. Therefore, there are large populations of certain sub-ethnic groups and communities in small areas rather than throughout California. AAPIs have had a long, hard road to gain equality and citizenship and have finally, over the last half of the century, maintained their standing as Asian Americans, not just as immigrants. While immigration may not be solely because of war anymore, many AAPIs still seek America as an opportunity to raise a family, have a safe home, and live in an area with many financial prospects.