

A Generation at Risk: The Threats to California in the Current Immigration Landscape



In its 2019 report, *Beyond the Border: Family Separation in the Trump Era*, UnidosUS demonstrates how the current trajectory of the nation's immigration policies is threatening the future of an entire generation of American children. Today, 80% of Latinos* are U.S. citizens¹ and half of those remaining are legal permanent residents.² While the portion of Hispanic adults who lack permanent legal immigration status is small, the impact of punitive immigration policies is felt by millions of families and has an outsized impact on American children. A growing body of research finds that indiscriminate immigration enforcement reaches well beyond immigrant families, affecting Americans of Hispanic descent and their communities³ by harming their physical and mental health,⁴ undermining their trust in government,⁵ and stoking fear for their families' safety.⁶

This issue brief on California is part of a series that builds on this analysis by exploring the stakes at the state level if the immigration policy status quo prevails. It compiles available population estimates to sketch a portrait of children in California's Latino immigrant families. For instance, while 97% of Latino children in California are U.S. citizens, 58% of them have at least one immigrant parent. Furthermore, California's Latino children are more than 50% of the state's youth and thus crucial to California's future success across various measures. Today, 37% of workers in California are Latino,⁷ as are 30% of its voters;⁸ thus, federal and state-level anti-immigrant policies that undermine the life outcomes of an entire generation of California's Latino children also depress a key engine of the state's economic and political future. The implications of restrictionist immigration policies extend well beyond harming children and their families in California: the long-term economic, social, and political health and vibrancy of the nation is at stake.

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* The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race. This document may also refer to this population as "Latinx" to represent the diversity of gender identities and expressions that are present in the community.

Hispanic Children in California (Ages 0-17) and Their Families

More than half of the children in California are Hispanic.⁹ The overwhelming majority of Hispanic children in the state are U.S. citizens, as are most Hispanic adults.¹⁰ If we scratch the surface, an estimated 58% of Hispanic children in California have at least one foreign-born* parent.¹¹ This points to a sizeable population of Hispanic parents in California who were born outside of the U.S. and ultimately naturalized. It is thus concerning that a growing body of research shows that the children of Hispanic immigrants, including naturalized citizens, experience the diffuse harms of punitive immigration enforcement policies,¹² such as fearing U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), toxic stress, and discrimination based on immigration status—even though the vast majority of Latino children are U.S. citizens.¹³

- 97% of Hispanic children in California (ages 0-17) are U.S. citizens.¹⁴
- 58% of Hispanic children in California (ages 0-17) have at least one foreign-born parent.¹⁵
- 72% of Hispanic adults in California are U.S. citizens;¹⁶ of those who are not, roughly 42% are legal permanent residents.¹⁷

Based on the best available research,[†] below are some characteristics of California’s nonresident (non-green card holding) Hispanic and immigrant populations and their children:

- Approximately 2.49 million Hispanic Californians lack legal immigration status. They represent roughly 81% of California’s undocumented population, but only 16% of the state’s Hispanic population.¹⁸
- An estimated 1,658,000 U.S.-born children in California live with at least one undocumented family member.¹⁹
- Roughly 186,120 Californians are Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)‡ recipients.²⁰ Research suggests that 26% of DACA recipients have at least one U.S.-born child;²¹ estimates show as many as 72,600 U.S.-born children in California may have a DACA recipient parent.
- As of 2017, 55,000 Hispanic Californians had Temporary Protected Status (TPS).§ They have at least 54,700 U.S.-born children.²²

Table 1: Child Populations

	Population, Ages 0-17		Hispanic Population Share
	Total	Hispanic	
CA	8,985,538	4,682,923	52%
U.S.	73,352,242	18,638,707	25%

Source: UnidosUS calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, “2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates,” American Community Survey, data.census.gov (accessed October 21, 2019).

* The U.S. Census Bureau defines foreign-born as anyone who is not a U.S. citizen at birth, including individuals who later become citizens through naturalization.

† By their nature, it is difficult to measure populations who lack stable immigration status. While these estimates do not provide definitive counts, they rely on the best available research of these populations.

‡ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) data show that approximately 95% of DACA recipients are of Hispanic origin.

§ Temporary Protected Status is a designation that USCIS can grant eligible nationals who are present in the U.S. at the time that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) deems their country of residence temporarily unsafe for return, e.g., due to ongoing conflict or natural disaster.

Health Outlook for California’s Hispanic Children

For more than a decade, significant progress has been made to reduce health coverage gaps for our nation’s children, including Latino children. Following the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the coverage disparity between Latinos and non-Hispanic Whites shrank from 7 to 4% nationwide.²³ However, in recent years, there have been indications that this progress has stalled or reversed in some cases.²⁴

California, a state that has embraced ACA implementation and been a leader in pursuing progressive policies to expand coverage to the remaining uninsured, including undocumented children, has not been immune. Since 2017, nearly 190,000 children in California have disenrolled from Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), the state’s low-income health insurance programs. There is little evidence that a strong economy—which should correspond with greater participation in employer-sponsored health coverage—is causing dropping health care enrollments from these programs.²⁵ Instead, child health experts believe that a variety of complex factors may be depressing enrollment, including the Trump administration’s restrictionist immigration policies. The impacts of these policies are called “chilling effects” because they create widespread fear that confuses and intimidates people from exercising their rights or accessing services for which they are legally eligible.

In addition, although California is more insulated from federal threats such as cuts to outreach and enrollment resources, its families are vulnerable to misinformation and confusion created by multiple congressional attempts to repeal the ACA, as well as the administration’s current attempt to undo the law via the ongoing Texas v. United States litigation. Overall, the environment is a challenging one for families whose children are legally eligible for some form of public health insurance, but who remain uninsured.

Most Hispanic children in California have immigrant roots, are disproportionately uninsured, and are at greater risk of chilling, even though nearly all are U.S. citizens who live with working parents.²⁶ Even though Hispanic children make up 52% of the total child population in California, 63% of California’s uninsured children are Hispanic.²⁷

Table 2: 2019 Uninsured Rates, Children in California (Ages 0-17)

All children in California	3.9%
U.S.-born Hispanic children of U.S.-born parents	4.5%
U.S.-born Hispanic children of foreign-born parents (all immigration statuses)	5.6%
Foreign-born Hispanic children	18.9%

Source: UnidosUS calculations using Sarah Flood, Miriam King, Renae Rodgers, Steven Ruggles, and J. Robert Warren. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 6.0 [ASEC]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D030.V6.0> (accessed Nov 22, 2019).

Table 3: Child Health Outcomes in California

	Hispanic	White non-Hispanic
Children not in “excellent” or “very good” health	15%	4%*
Children who did not receive at least one preventive medical care visit in the last 12 months	22%	16%

*Estimate falls within the margin of error.

Source: Data Resource Center for Child & Adolescent Health, “National Survey of Children’s Health, 2017-2018,” Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, <https://www.childhealthdata.org/> (accessed Aug 31, 2019).

Economic Outlook for California's Hispanic Children

Hispanic children in California are twice as likely to live in poverty (23%) than their non-Hispanic White peers (12%).²⁸ Even though Hispanic workers have a higher labor force participation rate than the U.S. average, they earn the lowest median wage of any ethnic group, regardless of immigration status.²⁹ Consequently, Hispanic families are likely to experience financial shocks more acutely than their peers. During the Great Recession (2005–2009), Hispanic households lost 66% of their collective household wealth, compared to White non-Hispanic households' 16% loss.³⁰ Immigration status compounds these disparities for families and the communities where they live, as observed during the foreclosure crisis of 2005–2012; Hispanic foreclosure rates in counties with higher shares of immigrant detentions and undocumented immigrant owner-occupied homes were significantly higher than in comparable counties in the same time period.³¹

During the Great Recession (2005–2009),
HISPANIC HOUSEHOLDS LOST 66%
of their collective household wealth

Table 4: The Burden of Housing Costs*

California families who spent 30% or more of monthly income on housing in 2018	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic White
Renters	58%	52%
Homeowners	43%	35%

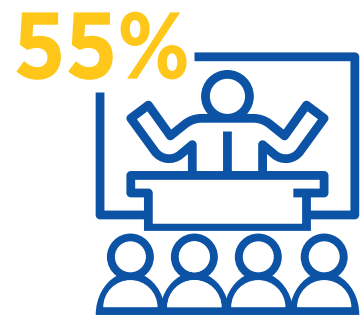
Source: UnidosUS calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, "2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S0201" American Community Survey, data.census.gov (accessed October 21, 2019). Bureau, "2018 American Community Survey 1-Year

Moreover, the intergenerational transfer of wealth is becoming an increasingly important factor in upward economic mobility, or the "American Dream." Growing research shows that income inequality in the U.S. today is likely to play a larger role in future adult outcomes than talent and hard work.³² Not only are American children in immigrant families more likely to live in poverty, their parents' ability to pass on future opportunities will be limited if they continue to be excluded from the economic advantages of naturalized citizenship,³³ either by restrictive federal immigration policy, the high cost of naturalization in the U.S.,³⁴ or both. The earning potential of more than a quarter of California's future workers will certainly impact prosperity in immigrant communities and the broader economy alike.

* Studies find that children in households with high housing cost burdens have worse health outcomes than their nonburdened peers. Sandra J. Newman, "Housing Affordability and Child Well-Being," *Housing Policy Debate* 25, no. 1 (2015): 116–151, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2014.899261> (accessed July 25, 2019).

Education Outlook for California’s Hispanic Children

Despite educational gains in recent decades for many Latino students, there are still significant barriers to universal quality education in the U.S., among them, the stress of an anti-immigrant climate. Three separate studies from the University of California, Los Angeles detail growth in behavioral and emotional problems in schools with large immigrant populations due to fears associated with immigration enforcement.³⁵ Teachers from primarily White schools report increasingly hostile school environments for ethnic minority students at levels unprecedented in their careers.³⁶ School is already a difficult developmental stage for all children; yet Hispanic children in the U.S.—in addition to experiencing common childhood anxieties—also fear family separation and share collective distress with their impacted classmates.



55%
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- 55% of K-12 students in California are Hispanic.³⁷
- 29% of Hispanic K-12 students in California are designated English learners (EL).³⁸
- 96% of Hispanic youth (ages 0-17) in California are U.S.-born American citizens.³⁹

Table 5: California Attainment on the Nation’s Report Card (NAEP 2019)*

Percent of students at or above NAEP Basic*

	Non-Hispanic White	Hispanic (Non-English learners)	Hispanic English learners
4th grade Math	89%	80%	42%
4th grade Reading	82%	68%	28%
4-year HS graduation rate	89%	87%	66%
% of college-going HS graduates**	70%	61%	37%

* “The [NAEP] Basic cut score represents the minimal performance to meet the requirements described for that level.” National Center for Education Statistics, 2019.

**Denotes high school graduates who enroll in any form of higher education within 16 months of graduation.

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, “NAEP Data Explorer,” National Center for Education Statistics, Washington, DC, 2019, <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/xplore/NDE> (accessed January 29, 2020); and California Department of Education, “DataQuest,” <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (accessed January 29, 2020).

* The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is “the largest continuing and nationally representative assessment” of student knowledge and ability in key subjects. The congressionally mandated program is managed by the U.S. Department of Education and is commonly used by researchers to compare academic progress across states.

Immigration-related stress not only undermines California's students, it also poses a risk to the state's teachers. In a 2018 Civil Rights Project, UCLA survey, 85% of 3,500 educators surveyed across the U.S. reported an "increase in anxiety and stress due to their students' experiences with increased immigration enforcement" in the past year; many exhibited symptoms consistent with Secondary Traumatic Stress.⁴⁰ High levels of stress and lack of institutional support are central drivers in the national teacher shortage crisis, especially in schools where students experience higher rates of poverty and inequality-related factors.⁴¹ California's critical teacher shortages have grown consistently since 2015;⁴² the state cannot afford to lose additional qualified educators due to immigration-related stressors. Everyone in California loses when students are too stressed to focus, and educators are too stressed to teach.

Measuring Chilling Impacts in California: The Public Charge Case Study

Direct harms produced by anti-immigrant policies are only half the story; their indirect, or chilling, impacts can be far-reaching. For example, following the Welfare Reform Act in 1996 (PRWORA),* restrictions imposed on eligible immigrant access to social safety nets had negative spillover effects, such as increased disenrollment from assistance programs by eligible U.S. citizens.⁴³ The opposite also appears to be true: states that maintained access to health and nutrition safety nets for eligible immigrants post-Welfare Reform saw an increase in high school graduation rates among Hispanic students, including a ten percentage point boost among students who would not have been subject to changes under PRWORA.⁴⁴

More than 20 years later, equivalents include policy changes such as the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) public charge regulation and its progeny. In many cases, the policy underpinnings for these rules expressly incorporate assumptions about their chilling impacts on eligible Americans in mixed-status families,⁴⁵ running contrary to evidence which shows that child poverty causes negative life outcomes that can be mitigated by government antipoverty programs.⁴⁶ Similar chilling effects can be observed following mass worksite raids and other immigration enforcement activities.⁴⁷

More than 2.5 million U.S. citizen children in California live in immigrant families with at least one eligible family member who participates in a public support program.

THEY ARE MOST AT RISK OF CHILLING UNDER POLICIES LIKE PUBLIC CHARGE.⁴⁸

- The ripple effects of the DHS public charge regulation are expected to cost the California economy \$3.2 to \$7 billion and 21,800 to 47,700 jobs.⁴⁹
- Roughly 580,000 Latino households in California accessed SNAP at some point in 2017.⁵⁰ That same year, SNAP helped lift nearly 500,000 Latino children out of poverty in the U.S.⁵¹

* Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Pub. L. 104-193. August 22, 1996.

- Early local government data, notably out of New York City, confirm anecdotal reports of dramatic public charge-related chilling impacts on SNAP enrollment on citizen and noncitizen Latinos alike. Enrollment by eligible Hispanic citizens in New York City unexpectedly dropped 6.4 percentage points between January 2018 and January 2019.⁵² While state and federal government data are not yet available, it is possible that a similar phenomenon will be observed among the 97% of Hispanic children in California who are U.S. citizens.

The DHS public charge regulation inspired other policy changes in its image, notably, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD)* proposed rule targeting American children in mixed-status households.⁵³

- Approximately 63,400 households that are eligible to receive rental supports in California have at least one noncitizen member.⁵⁴
- Among those families who would lose their homes under the proposed HUD rule, 85% are Hispanic.⁵⁵
- In 2017, 283,303 Hispanic children were lifted out of poverty in the U.S. by housing assistance.⁵⁶

Conclusion

With a child population that's more than 50% Latino, the influence and importance of Latinos to California's success will only continue to grow. Protecting and growing California's achievements will rely in part on investing in and protecting its homegrown Hispanic talent: today, more than 25% of entrepreneurs in California are Hispanic and one in every five dollars of spending power in the state's economy comes from a Hispanic family.⁵⁷ California's diversity is rich with potential for the state's future, but the state must be careful to safeguard this wealth from anti-immigrant, anti-family policies. History shows that righting this ship is possible, but the stakes are also high if the status quo prevails. Our future as a nation hangs in the balance if we do not cultivate and promote the full health, abilities, and well-being of California's Latino children, the majority of whom live in American mixed-status families.

About Us

UnidosUS, previously known as NCLR (National Council of La Raza), is the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Through its unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an [Affiliate Network](#) of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico, UnidosUS simultaneously challenges the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos at the national and local levels.

For more than 50 years, UnidosUS has united communities and different groups seeking common ground through collaboration, and that share a desire to make our country stronger. For more information on UnidosUS, visit www.unidosus.org or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

* HUD's proposed rule would change eligibility under Section 214 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1980. According to the agency's own analysis, the rule would force at least 55,000 eligible children to choose between eviction from their home and living with an ineligible parent or loved one.

Endnotes

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