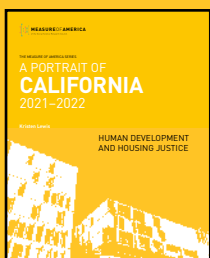
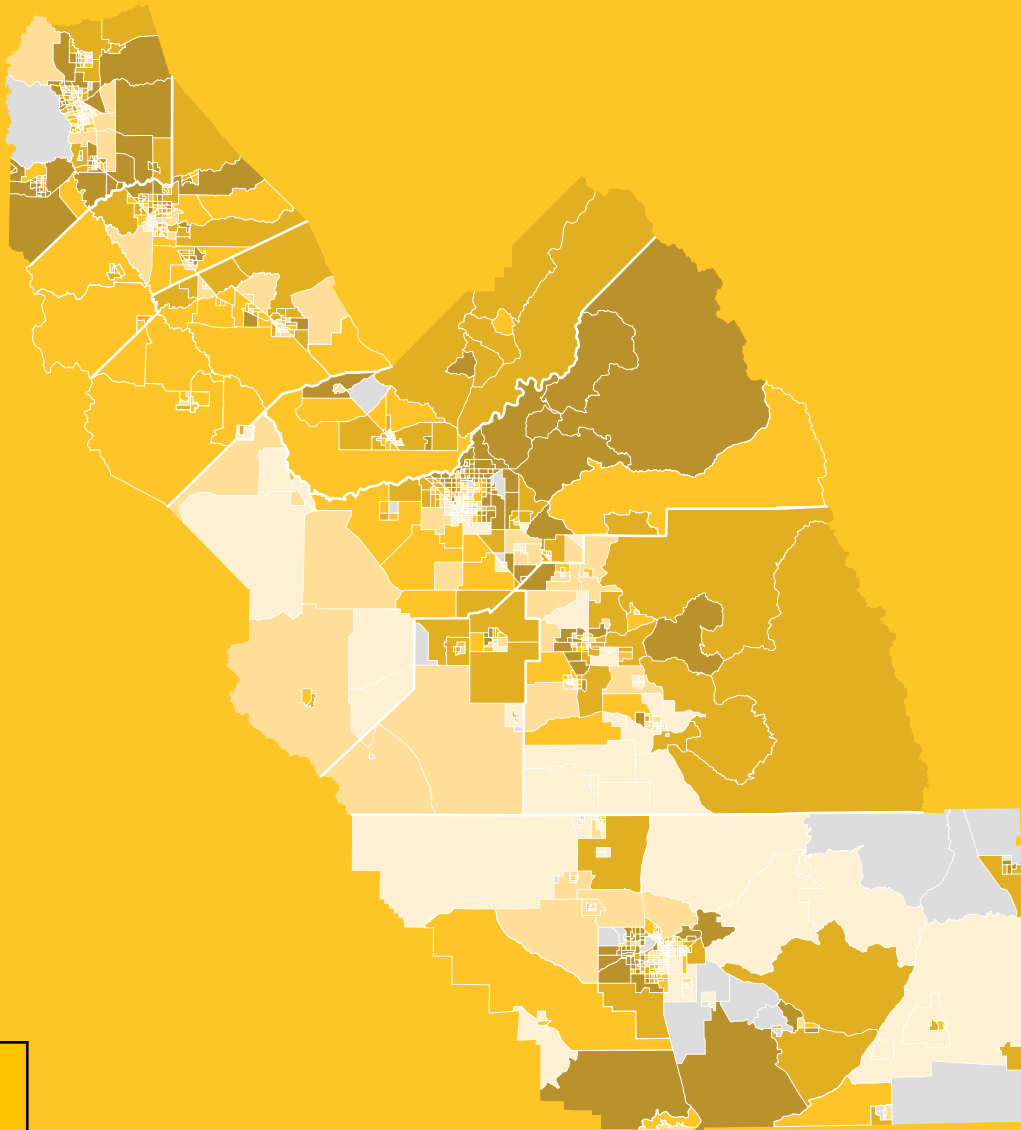


A PORTRAIT OF THE VALLEY:

SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2023



REGIONAL REPORT SERIES

A PORTRAIT OF **CALIFORNIA** 2021–2022

A PORTRAIT OF THE VALLEY:

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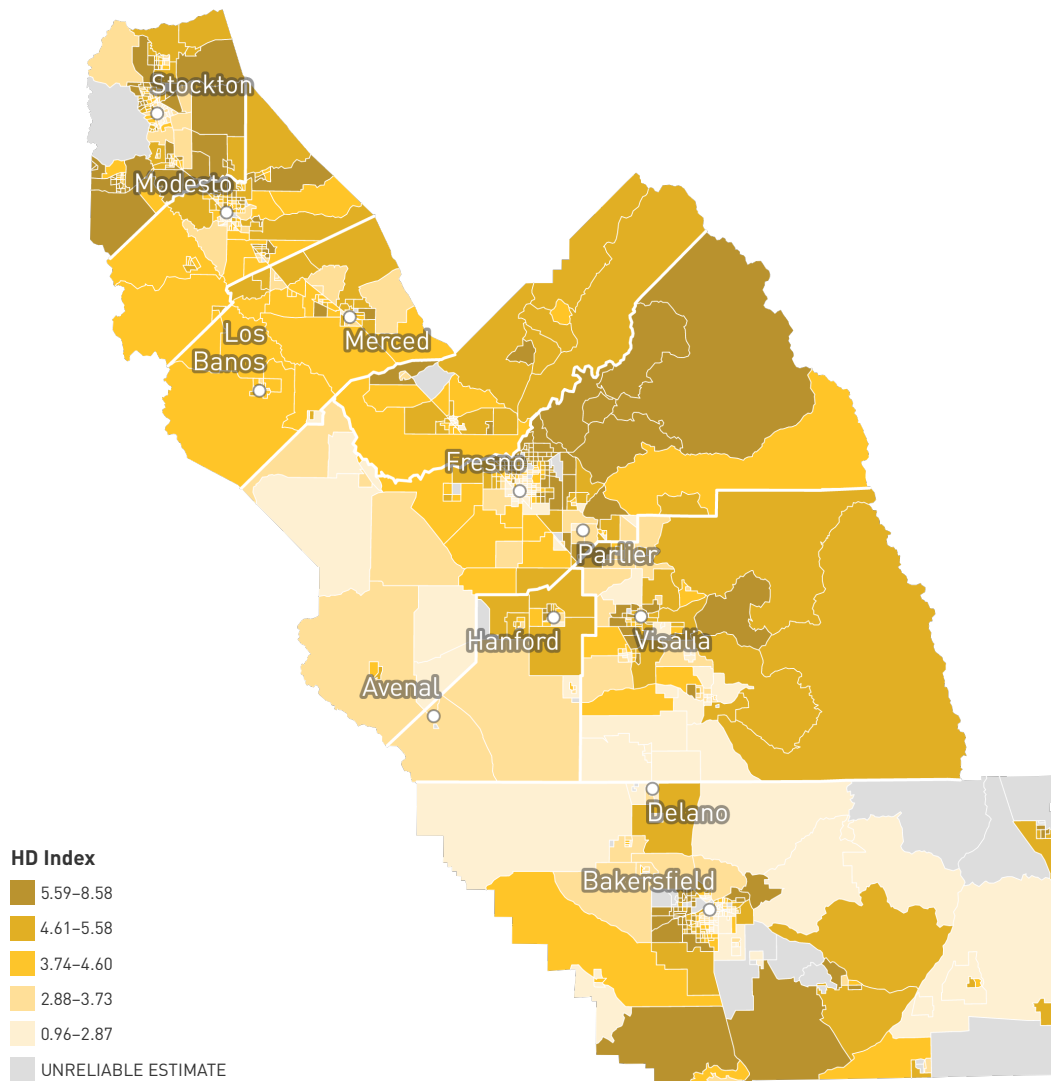
HDI
4.31

Life
Expectancy
78.2
years

Education
Index
3.77

Median
Earnings
\$31,100

MAP 1 HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX BY CENSUS TRACT



Introduction

This report paints a picture of well-being and access to opportunity across the eight counties that make up the San Joaquin Valley. It was guided by an advisory group of San Joaquin Valley organizations and individuals and is part of a larger project, *A Portrait of California 2021–2022*, which explores well-being in the state as a whole, with a special focus on housing. *A Portrait of the Valley* is informed by the human development approach and uses the American Human Development Index as a well-being gauge for places and population groups in the region.



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During the course of our research, an advisory panel of public servants, advocates, scholars, and nonprofit leaders from across the Valley contributed their expertise to guide our work with vision and care. We would like to thank them for their time, energy, ideas, and invaluable support. These advisors included:

Paul Almeida, UC Merced Community and Labor Center
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thank you!

Kristen

Understanding Human Development

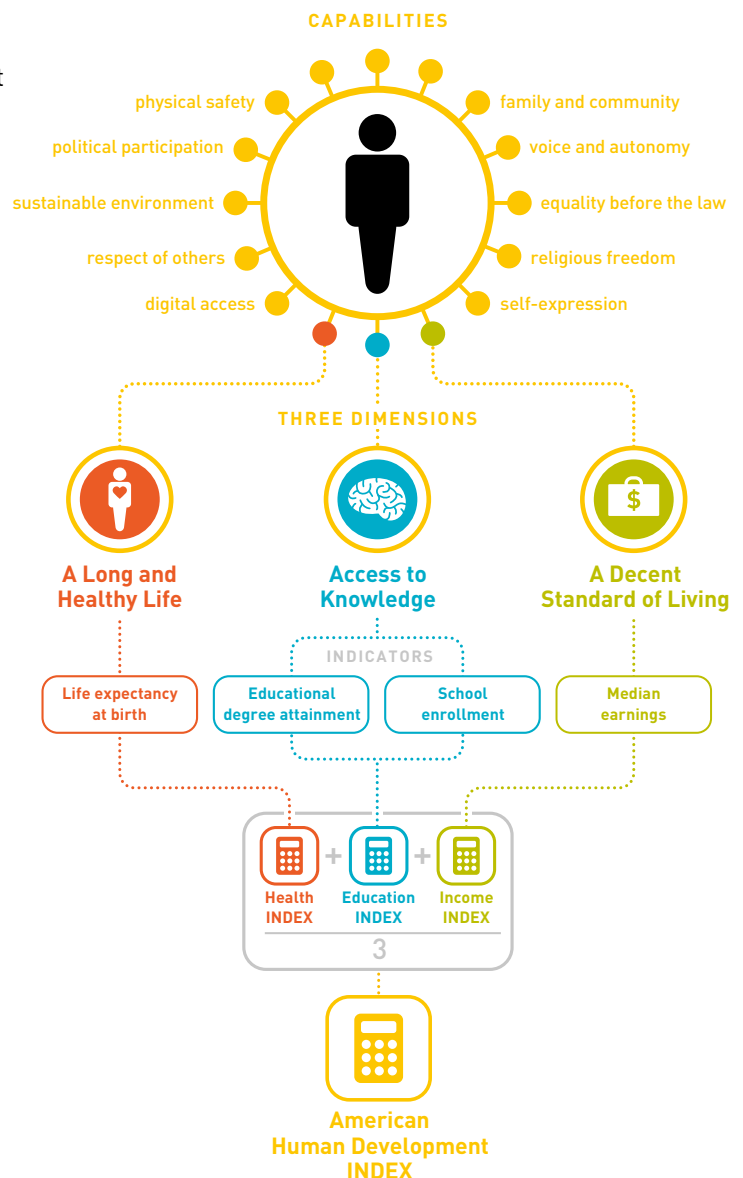
The American Human Development Index (HDI) is a measure of well-being and access to opportunity made up of health, education, and earnings indicators. The index is expressed on a scale of 0 to 10. Measure of America's HDI calculations provide a snapshot of community well-being, reveal inequalities between groups, allow for tracking change over time, and provide a tool for holding elected officials accountable. Broken down by race and ethnicity, by gender, and by census tract, the index shows how communities across the San Joaquin Valley are faring relative to one another and to the state and country as a whole.

The framework that guides this work is **the human development approach**. Human development is an expansive, hopeful concept that values people's dignity and freedom to decide for themselves what to do, how to live, and who to be. Formally defined as the process of improving people's well-being and expanding their opportunities to live freely chosen, flourishing lives, the human development approach puts people at the center of analysis. It is concerned with how political, social, environmental, and economic forces interact to shape the range of choices open to us.

A Long and Healthy Life is measured using life expectancy at birth, which is calculated using data from the California Department of Public Health, population data from the US Census Bureau, and USALEEP data for census tract-level estimates.

Access to Knowledge is measured using data on school enrollment for children and young people ages 3 to 24 and educational degree attainment for adults 25 and older from the American Community Survey of the US Census Bureau.

A Decent Standard of Living is measured using median personal earnings of all full- and part-time workers ages 16 and older from the American Community Survey of the US Census Bureau.



The human development approach rests on a robust conceptual framework: Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen’s seminal work on **capabilities**.¹ Capabilities can be understood as a person’s tool kit for living a thriving life. We tend to think of capabilities as an individual’s skills and talents. In the human development approach, the word’s meaning is far more expansive. Valued capabilities include good health, access to knowledge, sufficient income, physical safety, religious freedom, political participation, love and friendship, dignity and societal respect, equality under the law, social inclusion, access to the natural world, self-expression, agency, the ability to influence decisions that affect one’s life, and more.²

Another important idea in the human development framework is the concept of **human security**.³ Human security is concerned with the safety and freedom of people, rather than the integrity and protection of the state against military incursions and other external threats. Human development can be understood as the freedom *to*—to enjoy choices and opportunities and to live a flourishing life. Human security can be understood as freedom *from*—from chronic and sudden threats to our lives, rights, and dignity. The challenges of the last three years—including Covid-19, the sharp economic downturn and fast-rising housing costs that the pandemic spurred, school closures, heat waves and power outages, drought and groundwater depletion, and, in early 2023, record-breaking rains and floods⁴—and the disproportionate effects they have had on different groups, including Black, Latino, and Native American people, children, the elderly, and low-income communities, call out for a way to understand what is needed to keep people safe. Disasters like these threaten human life, shake our sense of safety, and wipe out years of progress and lifetimes of hard work in a matter of days or weeks. But preparedness, prevention, and protection can mitigate their effects.

The concept of human development is very broad; it includes all the factors that shape our lives. Because measuring everything in a single index is not possible, however, the HDI includes just three dimensions of well-being: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and a decent standard of living. People around the world value these areas as core building blocks of a life of freedom and dignity. In addition, good proxy indicators that are collected and tracked in a consistent way across time and place are available for each. These indicators are not perfect, however. For example, one-third of the index is called “access to knowledge,” but the indicators used, school enrollment and degree attainment, measure only *access to formal education*, leaving out other valuable ways of knowing. A decent standard of living is measured using median personal earnings; this indicator tells us about the wages and salaries of typical San Joaquin Valley residents but nothing about their assets and wealth, such as the value of their homes or investments, which are very important ingredients of human security. It is important to keep in mind that the index is just the start of a conversation about well-being, access to opportunity, and inequality. To understand the *why* behind the scores and craft effective policies to address disparities requires additional quantitative data as well as qualitative data—interviews, narratives, life histories, and more.

Human development can be understood as the freedom *to*—to enjoy choices and opportunities and to live a flourishing life. Human security can be understood as freedom *from*—from chronic and sudden threats to our lives, rights, and dignity.

Human Development in the San Joaquin Valley

The HDI score for the San Joaquin Valley is 4.31 out of 10, compared to 5.85 for the state as a whole. In the San Joaquin Valley, HDI scores vary significantly by gender, by race and ethnicity, and by place. Women across the eight counties that make up the San Joaquin Valley have an HDI score of 4.32, whereas men have a score of 4.19. This disparity is largely due to a 5.4-year difference in life expectancy as well as women's slightly higher levels of degree attainment. Men in the San Joaquin Valley, however, outearn women by a large margin; their median personal earnings are more than \$10,000 higher than women's.

Of the six racial and ethnic groups in the San Joaquin Valley for which it is possible to calculate HDI scores, Asian residents have the highest score, 5.55, followed closely

The HDI score for the San Joaquin Valley is 4.31 out of 10, compared to 5.85 for the state as a whole.

TABLE 2 Human Development Index by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity in the San Joaquin Valley

RANK	HDI	LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH (years)	EDUCATION INDEX (out of 10)	MEDIAN EARNINGS (\$)
California	5.85	81.1	5.45	39,900
San Joaquin Valley	4.31	78.2	3.77	31,100
GENDER				
1 Women	4.32	81.0	4.03	25,500
2 Men	4.19	75.6	3.50	35,900
RACE/ETHNICITY				
1 Asian	5.55	82.1	5.22	34,100
2 White	5.18	76.5	4.96	42,300
3 Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (NHOPI)	4.17	73.9	5.05	31,400
4 Latino	3.87	80.9	2.47	26,300
5 Black	3.32	70.6	3.83	31,600
6 Native American	2.67	70.2	3.37	26,200
GENDER AND RACE/ETHNICITY				
1 Asian Women	5.72	84.9	5.40	30,300
2 Asian Men	5.35	79.1	5.06	38,500
3 White Men	5.22	73.9	4.80	51,600
4 White Women	5.03	79.1	5.13	33,100
5 NHOPI Women	4.21	77.5	4.85	26,600
6 Latina Women	3.91	84.2	2.77	21,100
7 Black Women	3.76	73.6	4.33	29,700
8 Latino Men	3.72	77.9	2.19	30,800
9 Black Men	2.96	67.8	3.38	34,300
10 Native American Women	2.72	73.5	2.77*	23,900
11 Native American Men	2.51	66.2	3.88	28,900
NHOPI Men			5.19	40,900

Sources: Life expectancy: Measure of America calculations using mortality data from the California Department of Public Health, 2014–2020. Education and Earnings: US Census Bureau PUMS, 2016–2020.

Note: Estimates with an asterisk have a higher degree of uncertainty.

by white residents, who score 5.18. The score for Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders (NHOPI) in the San Joaquin Valley is 4.17, for Latino residents, 3.87, and for Black residents, 3.32. Native American San Joaquin Valley residents have the lowest score, 2.67. This low score is rooted in California's history of displacement, discrimination, land theft, family separation, and exclusion toward Native American peoples, and the resulting trauma and unequal distribution of resources of all sorts: political power, public goods like schools, labor market opportunities, land and housing, money in the form of earnings and assets, and more.

Asian, Black, Latina, and Native American women have higher HDI scores than their male counterparts, while white women have a lower HDI score than white men. (Because we were unable to calculate a statistically reliable score for NHOPI men, we cannot compare their score to that of NHOPI women.) Among Asian, Black, Latino, and Native American residents, women's longer life expectancies drive their higher HDI scores. While men earn more than women across all racial and ethnic groups, the gap between white men and women is the largest by far, about \$18,500; since men in this group so vastly outearn women, their HDI score is higher despite their lower life expectancy and lower levels of educational attainment.

Well-being also varies dramatically by place across the San Joaquin Valley. For this report, we calculated HDI scores by census tract. Census tracts are areas defined by the Census Bureau; they generally have a population size that falls between 1,200 and 8,000 people, with an optimum size of 4,900. There are 978 census tracts in the San Joaquin Valley, and all but 47 (931 in total) have sufficiently large populations to allow us to calculate a HDI scores. Census tracts can be a bit difficult to see on the maps in this report; please refer to our online map at <https://measureofamerica.org/california2021-22/sjv/> where you can enlarge the view and hover over different tracts to see their score.

Among census tracts in the San Joaquin Valley, HDI scores range from a low of 0.96 in Census Tract 13.01 in Kern County, which lies in Bakersfield and East Bakersfield, to a high of 8.58 in Census Tract 43.01 in Fresno County, which is bordered on the south by West Herndon Avenue and on the north by Madera County and contains Fig Garden Golf Club.

In the statewide report that accompanies this *Portrait of the Valley, A Portrait of California 2021–2022*, we use a framework called the Five Californias to explore the range of well-being and access to opportunity across the Golden State. The Five Californias are created by grouping areas⁵ not by geographic region but rather by HDI scores:

One Percent California consists of neighborhood clusters that score 9.00 or above out of 10 on the HDI. The 900,000 people, 2.3 percent of the state population, living in these mostly Bay Area communities enjoy higher levels of well-being and greater access to opportunity than almost anyone in the country. No San Joaquin Valley communities meet the criteria for One Percent California—a score of at least 9.00.

Elite Enclave California is made up of neighborhood clusters that score between 7.00 and 8.99 on the index. It is home to roughly eight million people, or one-fifth of the state's population, living mostly in the Bay Area, Los Angeles, and San Diego. Forty-eight San Joaquin Valley communities fall into this category.

Main Street California comprises neighborhood clusters that score between 5.00 and 6.99. More than eighteen million people, 46 percent of the population, live in this California. Main Street Californians have higher levels of well-being than the average US resident. Nonetheless, California's high cost of living means that some Main Streeters face levels of economic insecurity similar to that of Struggling California. In the San Joaquin Valley, 241 communities meet the criteria for this California.

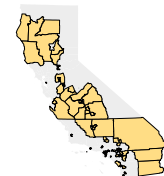
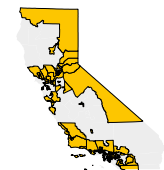
Struggling California is home to neighborhood clusters scoring between 3.00 and 4.99 on the index. They are found chiefly in greater Los Angeles, the San Joaquin Valley, the Central Valley, greater San Diego, and northern California. Struggling California's residents, who make up roughly 30 percent of the state's population, have lower levels of well-being than the typical American. The plurality of San Joaquin Valley communities, 426, fit into this category.

Disenfranchised California comprises neighborhood clusters that score below 3.00. There are 212 San Joaquin Valley communities that meet the criteria for this California. Other communities in this group can be found in the Inland Empire and Los Angeles County.

People living in Disenfranchised California—the 212 San Joaquin Valley communities that score below 3.00 on the HDI—experience many more barriers to opportunity than do those who live in the San Joaquin Valley's higher-scoring areas. Disenfranchised residents have much lower levels of well-being—shorter life expectancies, less access to education, and extremely low earnings—than others in the region or state, on average. Burdened by unremitting economic pressure to make ends meet in the face of some of the highest living costs in the country and reliant on overstretched and often inadequate public services, from schools to transportation to health care, people living in low-scoring areas face a circumscribed set of choices and opportunities. They also face tremendous human insecurity, as the pandemic made tragically clear: they were more vulnerable before Covid-19; they were hardest hit by its health, social, and economic effects; and they face the steepest climb to recovery.

People living in the forty-eight San Joaquin Valley census tracts that score 7.00 and above—Elite Enclave California—are not in any way immune to hardship or misfortune. In addition to the setbacks that are part and parcel of human existence, these residents also suffered the impacts of Covid-19 and are affected by high housing costs. But their rich set of capabilities—which tend to include educational credentials, jobs with benefits like health insurance and sick leave, comparatively high incomes, and access to public goods such as parks, high-quality schools, and safe living environments—acts as a buffer against sudden and chronic threats and provides the means to recover from serious misfortune.

The Five Californias are created by grouping areas not by geographic region but rather by HDI scores.



**BOX 3 Broad Racial Categories Mask Considerable Diversity**

The racial and ethnic categories used in this report, which are defined by the White House Office of Management and Budget and used for data collection across US agencies, are quite broad. For instance, the category “Asian” encompasses US-born citizens whose families have called the United States home since the mid-1800s as well as first-generation Asian immigrants, some long-settled and others newly arrived. These immigrants came from extraordinarily diverse circumstances—from uprooted refugees carrying the trauma of war and displacement to affluent elites in search

of educational and economic opportunities. For California as a whole, we were able to calculate scores for Asian subgroups. While many groups scored very highly (Taiwanese and Indian residents scored above 9.0; Chinese and Korean residents above 8.0; and Japanese, Filipino, and Vietnamese residents above 7.0), Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotian Californians scored between 4.0 and 5.0, lower than the statewide average. We discuss education and income indicators for Asian and Latino subgroups in the San Joaquin Valley later in this report.

People living in low-scoring areas face a circumscribed set of choices and opportunities.

BOX 4 Why Don't All Groups and Places Have an HDI Score?

You will notice that on some maps, specific census tracts appear in gray, and that in some tables, values for certain groups or locales are missing or have an asterisk. Gray areas and missing and asterisked values indicate that the data for that place or demographic group are less statistically reliable than data for more populous areas or larger groups.

Ideally, we would be able to provide scores not just for large demographic groups like Latino and white San Joaquin Valley residents, but also for smaller ones, such as NHOPI men or members of various Asian subgroups. The primary barrier to doing so is that the method we use to calculate life expectancy at birth requires a minimum number of deaths in each five-year age category. Even combining several years of California Department of Public Health mortality data for the San Joaquin Valley did not include deaths in a number of age groups for NHOPI men, making it impossible to accurately calculate life expectancy for this group. Because we don't have life expectancy for NHOPI men, we cannot calculate an HDI score for them. This is also true of Asian subgroups (though we discuss their education and income outcomes in this report).

Another limitation in our ability to provide everyone an HDI score stems

from the way in which the data we use for the index are collected. We would like, for example, to calculate scores for LGBTQ residents, but are unable to do so because the American Community Survey does

We understand the frustration and potential harms of not having reliable data on each and every demographic group in the San Joaquin Valley; vibrant communities can be made invisible in cases like this.

not provide a way for people to report information about their sexual and gender identities beyond marking the box for male or female. Other national surveys have started to ask about sexual orientation and (less commonly) gender identity, but results are either not publicly available, do not include the indicators necessary for calculating the HDI, or are not available for all US states. About 4.5 percent of the US adult population identifies as LGBTQ : over 11.3 million people.⁶ While developing an HDI score for LGBTQ adults is not yet possible,

results from other surveys suggest that this population would probably score lower on the health and earnings components of the HDI, but higher on education, relative to their cisgender straight counterparts. LGBTQ adults have higher rates of poverty and a lower life expectancy than their cisgender straight counterparts.⁷ Some LGBTQ adults have higher rates of college degree attainment than cisgender straight people (lesbian and gay adults) but others have similar (bisexuals) or lower attainment rates (transgender adults).⁸

For similar reasons, calculating scores for certain populations that face disproportionate challenges—such as young adults aging out of the foster care system, homeless people, or the formerly incarcerated—is also impossible. In short, we can only calculate scores for groups that are given the chance to self-identify on the American Community Survey and that are sufficiently large as to allow for reliable calculations. We understand the frustration and potential harms of not having reliable data on each and every demographic group in the San Joaquin Valley; vibrant communities can be made invisible in cases like this. To address data gaps, we provide all the data that make up the education and earnings subindices in the tables at the end of this report and discuss these data in the education and earnings sections.

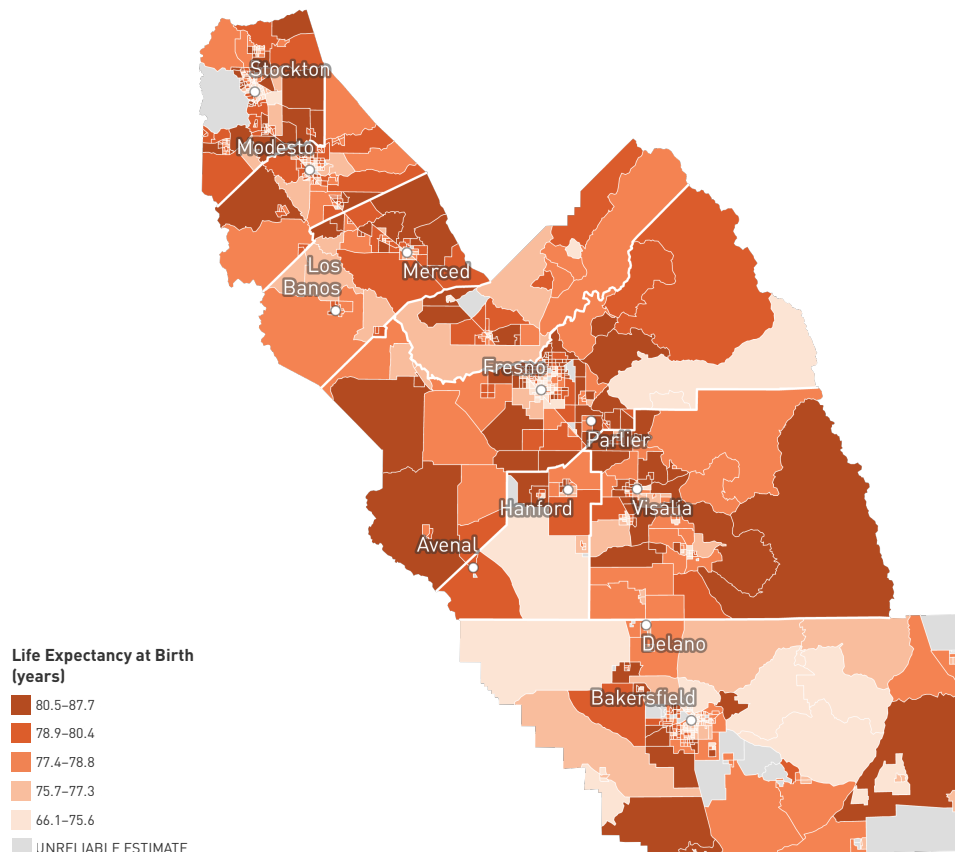
Health

Improving human development requires, first and foremost, increasing people's real opportunities to avoid premature death by disease or injury, to enjoy protection from arbitrary denial of life, to live in a healthy environment, to maintain a healthy lifestyle, to receive quality medical care, and to attain the highest possible standard of physical and mental health. Amid the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, health and its relationship with income and education, safety and human security, and race and place have come into sharp focus.

In the American Human Development Index, the proxy for a long and healthy life is life expectancy at birth, defined as the number of years that a baby born today can expect to live if current patterns of mortality continue throughout their lifetime. Although living a long life and living a healthy life are not synonymous, in general, those who manage to elude all causes of mortality until their eighties or nineties are healthier (as well as luckier) than the average person, and life expectancy is a widely used summary measure of population health.

Amid the pandemic, health and its relationship with income and education, safety and human security, and race and place have come into sharp focus.

MAP 5 Life Expectancy



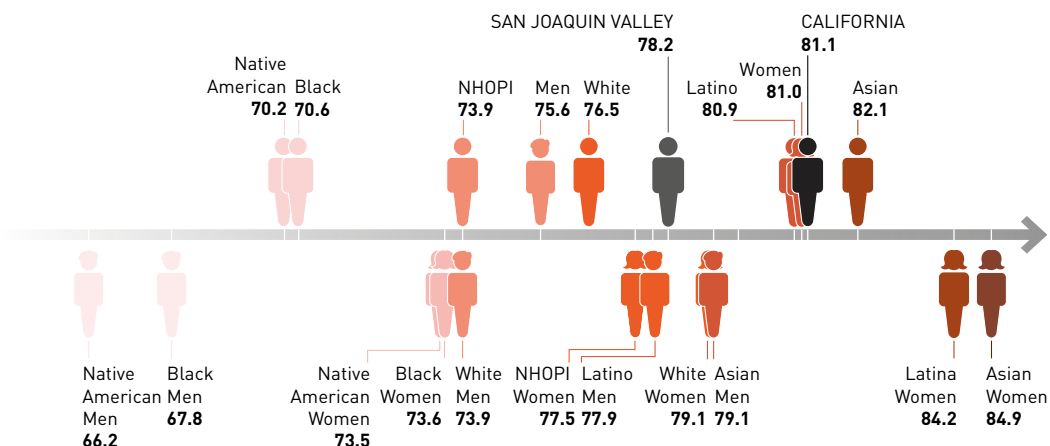
LIFE EXPECTANCY IN THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY TODAY

- The average life expectancy for residents of the San Joaquin Valley is 78.2 years, 2.9 years shorter than the state average.
- A baby girl born today in the San Joaquin Valley can expect to live 81.0 years, a baby boy, 75.6 years—a 5.4-year difference. Women tend to live longer than men in countries around the world, indicating some biological differences that advantage women, particularly when it comes to the leading cause of death, heart disease.⁹ But the variation in the male-female life expectancy gaps in different places around the world and among different racial and ethnic groups in the San Joaquin Valley points to the existence of social, cultural, and economic contributors as well. Men are more likely to engage in risk-taking, violence, and avoidance of health care¹⁰ and thus are more likely than women to die by homicide, by suicide, and as a result of unintentional injuries like car crashes;¹¹ are more likely to engage in risky substance use;¹² and are more likely to be exposed to health risks at work.¹³ In the San Joaquin Valley, the gender gap in life expectancy is widest among Native Americans, 7.3 years, and narrowest for whites, 5.2 years.
- Asian residents have the longest life expectancy, 82.1 years, and Asian women live the longest of any race/gender combination, 84.9 years. Asian American men in the San Joaquin Valley have a life expectancy of 79.1 years. Although Asian residents live longer than residents of other groups in the

The average life expectancy for residents of the San Joaquin Valley is 78.2 years, 2.9 years shorter than the state average.

FIGURE 6 Life Expectancy by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity in the San Joaquin Valley

LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH (YEARS)



Source: Life expectancy: Measure of America calculations using mortality data from the California Department of Public Health, 2014–2020.

Note: Data were not reliable for NHOPi men.

San Joaquin Valley, their life expectancy is considerably shorter than that of Asians in California as a whole, 86.8 years.

- Latino residents have the second-longest life expectancy, 80.9 years. Latina women, whose life expectancy is 84.2 years, outlive their male counterparts by 6.3 years. Around the world, populations with higher earnings and more education tend to live longer than those who earn less and complete fewer years of school. In the United States, California, and the San Joaquin Valley, however, this pattern does not hold; though Latinos have the lowest Education Index score, 2.67, in the Valley, and the second-lowest earnings, they live longer than any group except for Asians. This phenomenon is known as the Latino Health Paradox. Research points to several potential factors behind this pattern. Latinos have lower smoking rates than non-Latino whites,¹⁴ which may help to explain the lower mortality rates of US Latinos for most cancers, heart disease, and respiratory disease.¹⁵ Research around positive birth outcomes among Latinos points to protective aspects of Latino cultures, such as strong social support and family cohesion, that help bolster better health outcomes, particularly for mothers and infants.¹⁶ Research has shown that the health advantages of foreign-born Latinos tended to wear off the longer they were in the United States, possibly because immigrants are more likely to adopt the less-healthy diets and behaviors of the larger society over time.¹⁷ Covid-19 eroded the Latino health advantage nationally.¹⁸
- White residents' life expectancy is 76.5 years, 79.1 for women and 73.9 for men. White residents of San Joaquin Valley live 3.3 fewer years than whites in California as a whole.
- Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander residents have a life expectancy of 73.9 years, slightly longer—by nearly a year—than that of NHOPI residents in the state overall. NHOPI people are sometimes grouped with Asians in statistical exercises like this one; the acronym AAPI, Asian American and Pacific Islander, is often used for this combined group. For life expectancy as well as for other indicators, however, grouping NHOPI and Asians together can mask the challenges NHOPI people face, just as the term Asian can obscure the differences among people who trace their ancestry to countries as different as India, Japan, and Cambodia.
- Black residents of the San Joaquin Valley can expect to live 70.6 years, nearly eight years less than the average resident. The life expectancy for Black men is lower still, 67.8 years, whereas Black women have life expectancy of 73.6 years. Health inequities continue to present a major obstacle to flourishing, freely chosen lives for Black residents, who suffer disproportionately from specific health challenges, including high blood pressure (hypertension), heart disease, diabetes, and kidney disease (nephritis). In the state as a

Health inequities continue to present a major obstacle to flourishing, freely chosen lives for Black residents.

whole, Black women have the highest maternal mortality rate, 1.1 deaths per 100,000 women, about four times as high as the white maternal mortality rate, and the infant mortality rate, at 8.3 deaths per 1,000 births, is nearly double the average infant mortality rate for the state overall, 4.2 deaths per 1,000.

- Native American residents of the San Joaquin Valley have the shortest life expectancy among the region's racial and ethnic groups, 70.2 years, eight years less than the average resident and almost twelve less than Asian residents. Men's life expectancy is 66.2 years; women's, 73.5 years. Statewide, Native Americans have the highest poverty rate, with roughly one in five Native American residents and one in four Native American children living below the poverty line. Native Americans continue to die at higher rates than other Californians from specific health challenges, including chronic liver disease and accidents, such as unintentional overdoses, motor vehicle crashes, falls, and drownings. Research suggests that the cultural trauma, discrimination, and dispossession Native American communities have experienced at the hands of the US government continue to influence their health and well-being today.¹⁹

Among census tracts in the San Joaquin Valley, life expectancy ranges from 87.7 years in Census Tracts 66.05 and 66.06 in Reedley (Fresno County) to just 66.1 years in Census Tract 33.12 in Stockton (San Joaquin County).

BOX 7 Racism Harms Health

Individual and structural racism increase the frequency and severity of stressors to which Black, Indigenous, and other people of color are exposed throughout their lives. These stressors include experiencing racial violence, being discriminated against in employment or housing, suffering anxiety related to economic insecurity, and enduring medical mistreatment, such as being refused requests for care or receiving inadequate care for pain. Some of the disproportionate stress that Black and Indigenous Californians face stems from the fact that they are more likely to live below the poverty line and in segregated neighborhoods than their white counterparts (itself a consequence of racism). But while

education and affluence attenuate the impact of racism, they do not eliminate it.

Chronic stressors and traumatic events—like being the victim of a crime, having an incarcerated parent, or losing a loved one to Covid-19—have cumulative negative effects, and Black people experience greater exposure to both across their life course than people of other racial and ethnic groups. Chronic stress is not only psychologically harmful; it also harms the cardiovascular and other systems by constantly stimulating the fight-or-flight response and thus flooding the body with cortisol, adrenalin, and other hormones, causing excessive wear and tear on the body.^{20, 21}

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Living in a clean environment free of environmental hazards is essential to health and overall well-being. The effects of pollution on physical health are extensive and well documented.²² And environmental degradation is inextricably linked to other capabilities as well. Capabilities like high earnings and political voice allow the affluent to avoid exposure to pollution by living in greener—more expensive—neighborhoods, by influencing policymakers to keep polluting industries far away from their homes and schools, and by wielding enough social, political, and economic power to counterbalance the influence of formidable financial interests.²³ Disenfranchised communities, particularly those with high concentrations of Black, Latino, and Native American residents, are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation and are more likely than others to live in areas threatened by the effects of climate change, such as excessive heat and more frequent and severe extreme weather events.

The goal of environmental justice is to create a healthy environment for all, not just for those who can afford it. Much like the capabilities approach that frames this report, environmental justice considers the unequal distribution of environmental risks and benefits along race and class lines to be a result of—and a contributing factor to—broader inequalities.²⁴ Some issues that particularly affect San Joaquin Valley residents include air pollution, pesticide exposure, poor water quality, and climate-change-fueled heat waves, droughts, and floods. The most disadvantaged communities in the Valley, particularly those in unincorporated rural areas beyond city borders, experience the cumulative effects of all these hazards, facing threats from the air they breathe, the chemicals they come into contact with, the water they drink, and the increasingly hazardous environments in which they live.

Air Pollution: Exposure to air pollution is a significant health hazard; it increases the risk of respiratory and cardiovascular disease, adverse reproductive outcomes, neurologic disease, premature death, and all-cause, cardiovascular, and influenza mortality.²⁵ According to a national study, low-income Americans are more likely than others to have respiratory problems, such as asthma and lung disease, largely due to air pollution exposure.²⁶

In addition to raising the risk of the two leading causes of death, cancer and heart disease,²⁷ air pollution, particularly small particulate matter—tiny particles in the air that can travel into the respiratory tract all the way to the lungs—has been found to increase sickness and death from Covid-19. A 2022 study found that Californians with the greatest long-term exposure to particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) were 20 percent more likely to contract Covid-19 and more than 50 percent as likely to die from it than those with the least exposure. Californians face greater exposure to air pollution than residents of any other state; six in ten state residents breathe air that does not meet federal safety standards. The state's highest concentrations of particulate matter pollution are found in the San Joaquin Valley and greater Los Angeles.²⁸



The goal of environmental justice is to create a healthy environment for all, not just for those who can afford it.

Ground-level ozone, which is the main ingredient in smog, also threatens the health of San Joaquin Valley residents. Ground-level ozone results from the interaction of sunlight and pollutants from sources such as cars and trucks, tractors and irrigation equipment, gas and oil refineries, and chemical, industrial, and power plants, which causes a dangerous chemical reaction.²⁹ Ozone levels in the Valley are highest in the summer. The topography of the Valley makes ozone a particular risk, as both locally generated pollutants and pollutants blown east from the San Francisco Bay area are trapped by the surrounding mountains. Ground-level ozone can cause coughing and sore throat, make it difficult and even painful to breathe deeply, damage the airways, make the lungs more vulnerable to infection, and aggravate lung diseases like asthma, emphysema, and chronic bronchitis.³⁰ Bakersfield, Visalia, and greater Fresno are the second, third, and fourth cities most-polluted by ozone in the country.³¹

Pesticides: The use of pesticides is a major environmental and health issue in the San Joaquin Valley. Pesticides are particularly dangerous to farmworkers, who are most exposed to them, and their families, who also face heightened exposure from pesticide residue on clothing and in vehicles; to children, whose developing brains and growing bodies are vulnerable to environmental toxins of all sorts; to people with respiratory illnesses and lung diseases; and to everyone who drinks water contaminated by agricultural runoff. A study of older adults living in the Valley found that evidence that their cumulative exposure to pesticides caused oxidative stress, which damages tissues and speeds aging; inflammation, which harms tissues and organs; and dysfunction of the mitochondria, the part of our bodies' cells that produce energy, all of which are implicated in the development of cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic conditions.³² A study of over 500,000 births in the San Joaquin Valley found that pesticide exposure negatively affected three critical birth outcomes—birth weight, gestational age, and birth abnormalities.³³ Research shows that a pregnant woman's exposure to the insecticide chlorpyrifos can lead to "long-term, potentially irreversible changes in the brain structure of the child," leading to cognitive deficits and difficulties in behavioral functioning.³⁴ The use or possession of chlorpyrifos became illegal in California on December 31, 2020,³⁵ but its grim legacy continues to affect families across the Valley.

Water Supply: Access to sufficient quantities of safe, clean, and affordable water for drinking, cooking, personal hygiene, washing and cleaning, and other household uses is an internationally recognized human right as well as a right codified in California law—albeit one that too many low-income San Joaquin Valley families struggle to realize.³⁶ Nearly 100,000 San Joaquin Valley residents, most of them Latino, living in disadvantaged unincorporated communities (DUCs) in rural areas outside city limits cannot safely drink the water that pours from their

Bakersfield, Visalia, and greater Fresno are the second, third, and fourth cities most-polluted by ozone in the country.

taps.³⁷ Industrial by-products from the agricultural, oil and gas, transportation, and manufacturing sectors; naturally occurring toxins like arsenic; and contaminants left behind in water because of substandard wastewater disposal and treatment systems threaten the safety of the water supply and the health of those who drink it. In addition, in many areas, the supply of water is dwindling, as years of large-scale agricultural extraction of water leads more household wells to run dry. Like people living in informal settlements in the world's poorest countries, low-income rural households in DUCs in the Valley not only lack reliable access to clean water, but also pay more than those with access to safe municipal water supplies—both for the dirty, unsafe water piped into their homes and for the expensive bottled water they have no choice but to purchase for drinking and cooking.³⁸

Exposure to Climate Change Risks: Climate change is already increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, from heat waves, droughts, and fires to heavy rains and floods. Farmworkers and others who earn their livings outdoors face threats to both their health and their livelihoods. For instance, the long-standing overpumping of groundwater, worsened by years of drought, and new regulations that limit the draw on the underground aquifer are already affecting the agricultural industry.

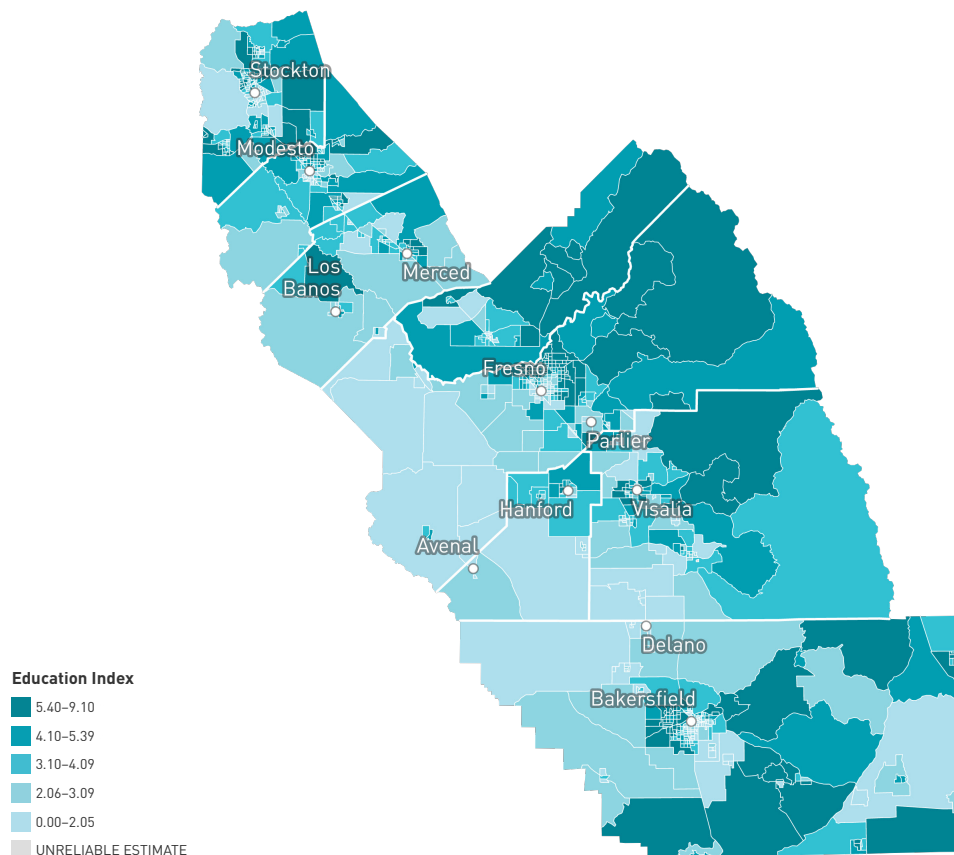
Education

It is common knowledge that more education typically leads to better jobs and bigger paychecks—a relationship stronger today than ever before. Globalization and technological change have made it difficult for people with limited formal education to achieve the economic self-sufficiency, peace of mind, and human security enabled by a living wage across the United States. Less well-known are the ways in which education and knowledge more broadly also make desirable noneconomic outcomes more likely. More than just allowing for the acquisition of skills and credentials, education builds confidence, confers status and dignity, and provides access to a wider range of possible futures. More education is associated with better physical and mental health, a longer life, and greater marital stability, tolerance, and ability to adjust to change.

Access to knowledge is measured using data on school enrollment for children and young people ages 3 to 24 and educational degree attainment for adults 25 and older from the American Community Survey of the US Census Bureau. It is

Access to knowledge is measured using data on school enrollment for children and young people ages 3 to 24 and educational degree attainment for adults 25 and older.

MAP 8 Education Index



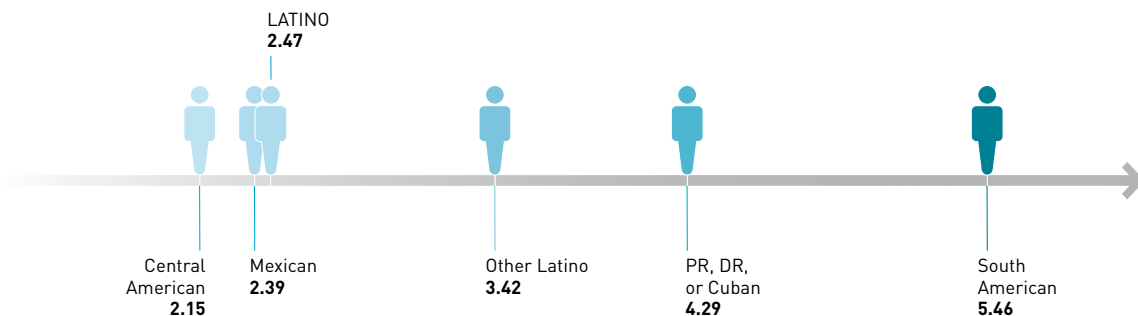
important to note that the indicators used to measure access to knowledge—school enrollment and degree attainment—measure only *access to formal education*. Using indicators of formal education as a stand-in for the broad concept of knowledge is commonplace in social science research and has many advantages (for instance, the data are collected and made available every year). But doing so leaves unmeasured and unacknowledged all other valuable and important ways of knowing that allow communities to survive and flourish and that are sources of strength, resilience, pride, and identity. A more holistic measure of access to knowledge would include not just what people learn in school but also what they learn at home and in their communities about how the world works, what is valuable, what it means to be a good person, how to overcome challenges, and how to carry out most of the practical tasks of living, to name just a few.

Compared to adults ages 25 and up in California as a whole, adult residents of the San Joaquin Valley are less likely to have earned a high school diploma and about half as likely to hold a bachelor's degree.

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES IN THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY TODAY

- Compared to adults ages 25 and up in California as a whole, adult residents of the San Joaquin Valley are less likely to have earned a high school diploma, 84.5 percent compared to 76.1 percent, and about half as likely to hold a bachelor's degree, 37.1 percent compared to 18.0 percent. San Joaquin Valley young people between the ages of 3 and 24 are about as likely to be enrolled in school as other young Californians, however.
- Compared to boys and young men, girls and young women ages 3 to 24 have slightly higher rates of school enrollment in the San Joaquin Valley, and women ages 25 and up enjoy an edge over their male counterparts across all educational outcomes, from high school graduation to graduate degree attainment.

FIGURE 9 Education Index by LATINO Subgroup in the San Joaquin Valley



Source: US Census Bureau PUMS, 2016–2020.

- About six in ten Latino adults ages 25 and up in the San Joaquin Valley have graduated high school, compared to at least eight in ten adults from each of the other five major racial and ethnic groups. Latino adults also have the lowest rates of bachelor's and graduate degree attainment, at 8.6 and 2.1 percent, respectively. The disparities in degree attainment are largely due to the limited opportunities that Latino immigrants had to complete their educations in their home country, which for the majority of Latinos in California is Mexico. Three in four Latino young people ages 3 to 24 are enrolled in school, higher than the school enrollment rates among Black or Native American residents. Significant variation in education indicators—based on country or region of origin—exists for Latinos. About 40 percent of Mexican and Central American San Joaquin Valley residents have less than a high school education; compared to 20.2 percent of Latinos from Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, or Cuba. Thirty-six percent of South American residents have at least a bachelor's degree, a higher share than almost every other group or subgroup in the San Joaquin Valley.

Thirty-six percent of South American residents have at least a bachelor's degree, a higher share than almost every other group or subgroup in the San Joaquin Valley.

TABLE 10 Education Index by Race and Ethnicity in the San Joaquin Valley

	EDUCATION INDEX	HIGHEST DEGREE ATTAINED				SCHOOL ENROLLMENT
		Less than high school	High school diploma	Bachelor's degree	Graduate degree	
SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY	3.77	23.9%	58.2%	12.2%	5.8%	76.3%
Asian Women	5.40	20.9	44.5	24.0	10.6	82.0
NHOPI Men	5.19	14.4	67.6	13.9	4.1*	87.6
White Women	5.13	9.0	65.2	16.9	8.9	78.5
Asian Men	5.06	19.2	48.6	21.0	11.2	78.5
NHOPI Women	4.85	10.9	70.0	13.7	5.4*	81.3
White Men	4.80	9.6	65.6	16.1	8.8	75.8
Black Women	4.33	11.9	68.6	11.7	7.8	74.9
Native American Men	3.88	17.9	69.5	8.3	4.3*	77.9
Black Men	3.38	15.2	68.5	10.0	6.4	68.6
Native American Women	2.77*	21.1	66.2	9.8	2.9*	68.3
Latina Women	2.77	37.0	53.1	7.4	2.4	77.3
Latino Men	2.19	40.4	52.1	5.7	1.8	74.2

US Census Bureau PUMS, 2016–2020.

*Estimates with an asterisk have a higher degree of uncertainty.

- Asian residents have the highest rates of bachelor's and graduate degree attainment among all major racial and ethnic groups in the San Joaquin Valley and the second-highest school enrollment rate, after NHOPi residents. Despite a high rate of postsecondary degree attainment, however, the Valley's Asian population has the second-largest share of adults who lack a high school diploma, about one in five. This split performance is rooted in the significant disparities that exist across and within Asian subgroups. Though less than 10 percent of Japanese, Korean, and Filipino adults lack a high school degree, in all other groups, between 22.5 percent (Chinese) and 37.5 percent (Pakistani) of adults do. Looking at the composite Education Index score, Japanese and Korean residents fare the best, with scores approaching 8.00 out of a possible 10.0. Filipino, Chinese, and Indian residents also outpace the region as a whole, with Education Index scores of 5.95, 5.64, and 5.35, respectively, as do Pakistani (4.52) and Vietnamese (4.72) residents. Hmong, Laotian, and Cambodian residents have the lowest scores among Asian subgroups, all below 4.00; though lower than the overall Asian score, these index values are not much below the San Joaquin Valley score, however.
- In all racial and ethnic groups for which it is possible to disaggregate the Education Index by gender, women have higher Education Index scores than their male counterparts, with the exception of NHOPi and Native American residents.

There are dramatic educational gaps between places in the San Joaquin Valley. The Education Index in the San Joaquin Valley tops out at a sky-high 9.11 out of 10 in Census Tract 44.11, containing National University and the Bluffs in Fresno, followed by 8.82 in Census Tract 55.03 in Fresno County, just east of Rolling Hills in Madera County. At the other end of the spectrum, 48 census tracts in the Valley score below 1.0.

In all racial and ethnic groups for which it is possible to disaggregate the Education Index by gender, women have higher Education Index scores than their male counterparts, with the exception of NHOPi residents.

OUTCOMES FOR TODAY'S SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

The Education Index includes the share of adults ages 25 years and up with high school diplomas, but the educational outlook for today's high school students is equally important. In 2022, the vast majority of high school students in the San Joaquin Valley graduated on time (87 percent),³⁹ on par with the statewide rate, but variation by place was considerable. Kings County had the lowest graduation rate (80 percent) and the highest dropout rate (10 percent). Merced County had the highest graduation rate (92 percent), the lowest dropout rate (5 percent), and the most equitable graduation rates across districts (i.e., the smallest range in graduation rates between the lowest-performing district and the highest).

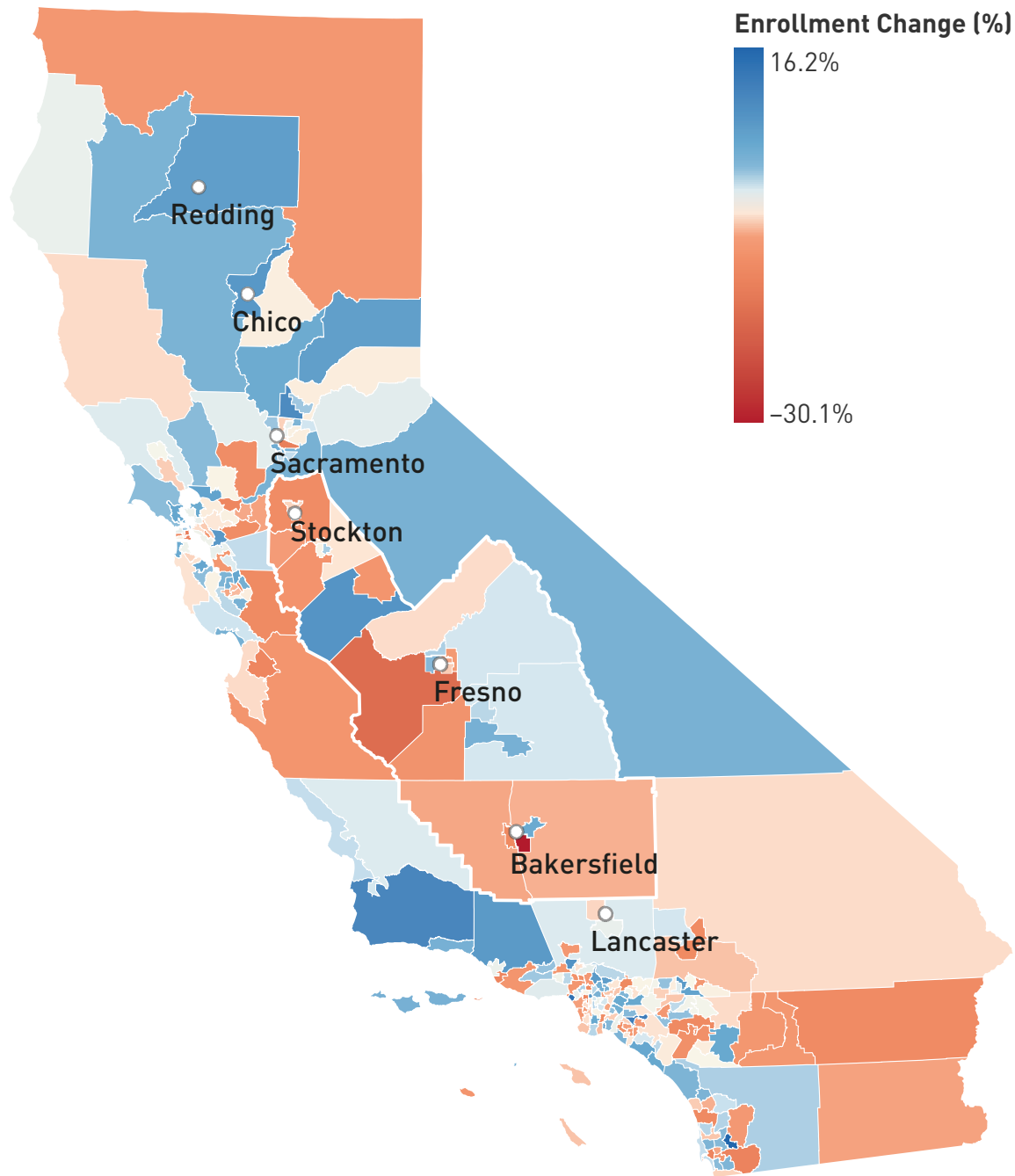
Chronic absenteeism, defined as missing more than 10 percent of the academic year, was especially high in Merced and Madera Counties in 2022, at 40 percent and 42 percent, respectively. Each county has several high-performing districts, but three—Fresno, Tulare, and Kings—have districts where only one in five students or fewer graduate on time.⁴⁰

Statewide, 63 percent of high school graduates enrolled in college in 2020, a drop from 66 percent in 2019 that can be attributed to Covid-19. Except for Fresno, all other counties in the Valley had a college-going rate of less than 60 percent in 2020. School enrollment more broadly—the share of children and young adults between the ages of 3 and 24—fell sharply in much of the state between 2019 and 2020, with the sharpest drop, over 30 percent, in the Bakersfield area, and the second-largest drop, 16 percent, in Selma, Kerman, and Coalinga in Fresno County.

TABLE 11 High School Graduation Rates by County in the San Joaquin Valley

COUNTY	HIGHEST ↑		LOWEST ↓	
	DISTRICT WITH THE HIGHEST GRADUATION RATE	RATE	DISTRICT WITH THE LOWEST GRADUATION RATE	RATE
Fresno	Kingsburg Joint Union High	97.4	Raisin City Elementary	15.9
Kern	McFarland Unified	97.2	Maricopa Unified	73.8
Kings	Lemoore Union High	97.0	Kit Carson Union Elementary	20.1
Madera	Chawanakee Unified	96.4	Yosemite Unified	83.9
Merced	Delhi Unified	97.8	Gustine Unified	89.6
San Joaquin	Lammersville Joint Unified	99.3	New Jerusalem Elementary	79.5
Stanislaus	Keyes Union	100.0	Denair Unified	85.7
Tulare	Tulare Joint Union High	97.1	Stone Corral Elementary	18.8

MAP 12 School Enrollment Change by Neighborhood Cluster, 2019 to 2020



Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau ACS, 2019–2020.

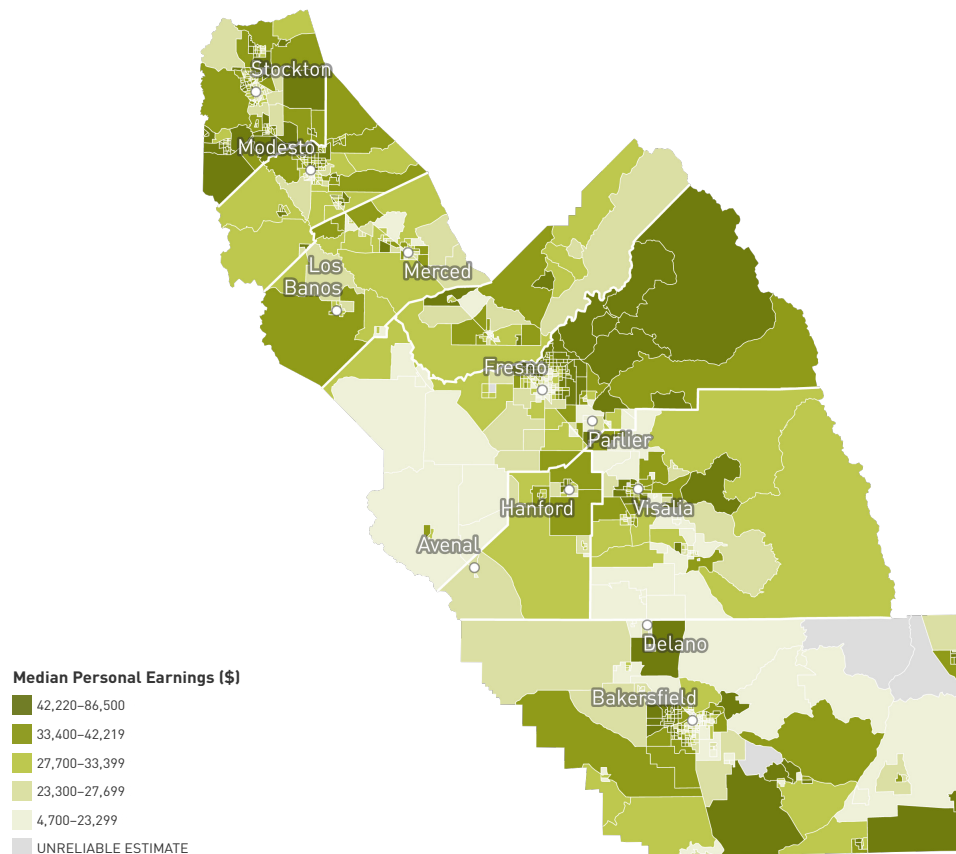
Earnings

Money alone is a faulty gauge of well-being; that idea is central to the human development approach. A good life is built on much more than the size of one's bank account: physical health, safety and security, love and friendship, freedom to practice one's faith, equality before the law, being treated with dignity and respect, and having a say in the decisions that affect us, to name just a handful of ingredients for a freely chosen, flourishing life. But while money can't buy happiness, it can certainly stave off many sources of unhappiness, like living in an overcrowded home, facing an excessively long commute, or being harassed by bill collectors. Without money, the range of the possible is vastly curtailed.

Many different measures can be used to gauge people's material standard of living. The American Human Development Index uses median personal earnings—the wages and salaries of all full- and part-time workers 16 years of age and older. This measure reflects the resources of the ordinary worker (thus the median, or midpoint, of earnings rather than mean, or average, earnings) and captures the

While money isn't everything, adequate financial resources are nonetheless a critical ingredient for a freely chosen, flourishing life.

MAP 13 Median Earnings

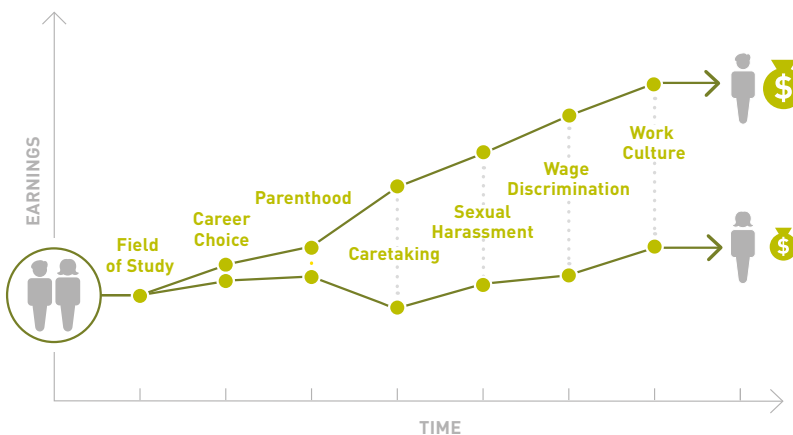


command that both women and men have over economic resources (thus the focus on personal rather than household earnings). Many people ask if wages are adjusted for cost of living; they are not. Methodologies for adjusting for cost of living do not sufficiently account for local variation.

LIVING STANDARDS IN THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY TODAY

- Median personal earnings in the San Joaquin Valley are \$31,100, about \$8,800 less than in the state overall. Men vastly outearn women, \$35,900 versus \$25,500, a difference of \$10,400. **Though the sizes of the earnings gaps vary by race and ethnicity, women across the San Joaquin Valley earn much less than men, a phenomenon also found in California and in the country as a whole.** This stubborn wage disparity is rooted in socialization, cultural norms, and gender stereotypes as well as outright wage discrimination. Girls and boys are often encouraged to study different subjects in high school and college, with boys more likely to pursue courses of study that prepare them for higher-paying careers in computer science, engineering, and math. As adults, women disproportionately shoulder responsibilities for domestic tasks and caretaking,⁴¹ which can push them to leave lucrative career tracks with punishing hours or to pursue part-time work. Compared to full-time work, part-time work tends to pay less and offer worse benefits, less job security, less predictable hours, and, paradoxically, less flexibility—though flexibility is what many working mothers are seeking in opting for

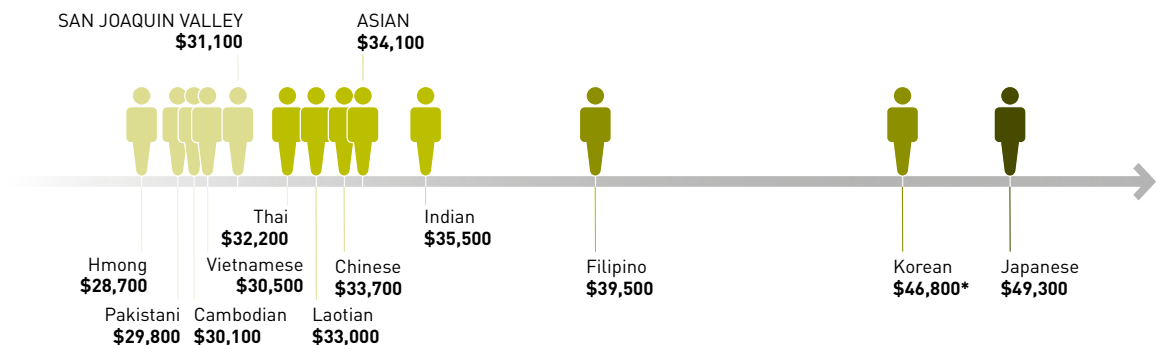
FIGURE 14 Key Factors behind the Gender Earnings Gap



a part-time schedule.⁴² During the pandemic, the caretaking burden grew both heavier and more lopsided, so much so that 4.5 million women left the workforce completely.⁴³

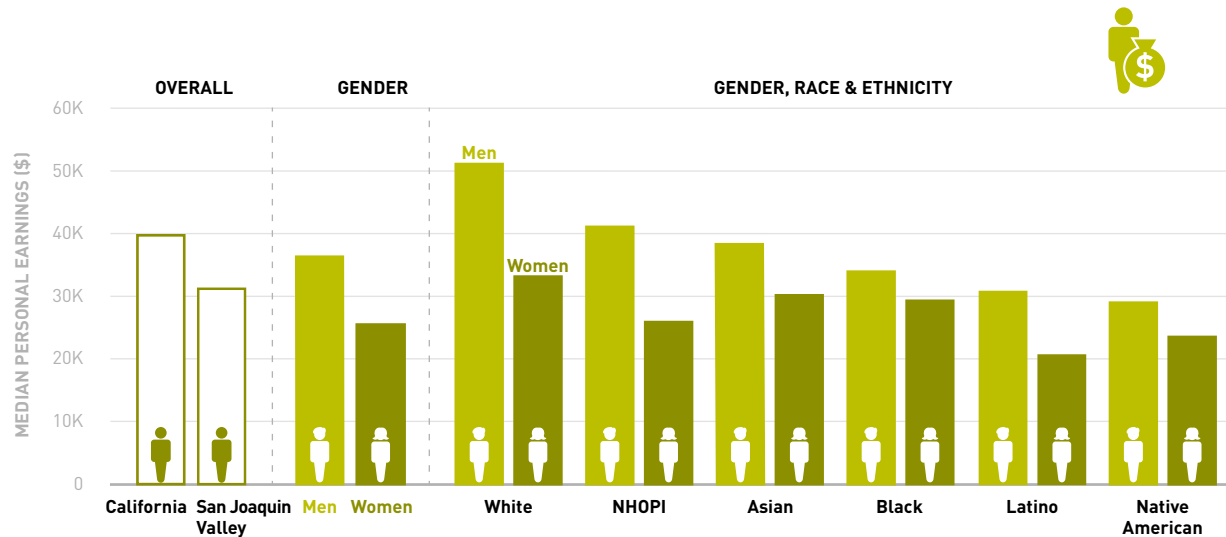
- Among racial and ethnic groups in the San Joaquin Valley, white residents earn the most, \$42,300, while Native American (\$26,200) and Latino (\$26,300) residents earn the least. A difference of about \$16,000 separates these groups. Latina women have the lowest earnings of any race/gender combination in the San Joaquin Valley, \$21,100. The top-earning group, white men (\$51,600), make well more than double what Latina women earn: roughly \$30,500 more.
- Asian earnings are \$31,100, but range by Asian subgroup from about \$28,700 for Hmong residents to \$49,300 for Japanese residents. Disaggregating the Latino population shows a range in median personal earnings from \$26,100 for Mexican residents and \$26,200 for Central American residents to \$30,800 for Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Cuban residents.
- By census tract, earnings range from \$86,500 in Census Tract 52.22 in San Joaquin County to \$11,900 in Census Tract 43.01 in Tulare County, which comprises a mostly rural area northeast of Delano. There are eight census tracts with lower median earnings, but they all contain either student housing or correctional institutions, home to people with low or no earnings.

FIGURE 15 Earnings by ASIAN Subgroup in the San Joaquin Valley



Source: US Census Bureau PUMS, 2016–2020.

*Estimates with an asterisk have a higher degree of uncertainty.

FIGURE 16 Median Earnings by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity in the San Joaquin Valley

Source: US Census Bureau PUMS, 2016–2020.

MAKING ENDS MEET IN THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY

January 1, 2023, brought higher wages to people across California; the minimum wage is now \$15.50 per hour. But is \$15.50 enough to cover living costs in the San Joaquin Valley? For most families, it is not.

A study by the United Ways of California, *The Real Cost Measure in California 2021*, outlines what it takes to make ends meet for different-sized households in various parts of the state. Unlike the federal poverty measure, which was developed in the 1960s and is based in large part on the cost of food, which at the time accounted for about one-third of household expenditures, the Real Cost Measure is based on a modest set of expenses essential for life in the twenty-first century: not just food but also housing, transportation, health care, taxes, and childcare. A family of four in the San Joaquin Valley today spends nearly as much on both transportation and health care as they do on food, about 10 percent more on housing, and nearly 50 percent more on childcare.

Using 2019 data for the eight counties that make up the San Joaquin Valley, the study estimated that essential costs for a household consisting of two adults, a preschooler, and a school-age child topped \$73,000 annually—which is more than \$84,600 in today's dollars, given the quick pace of inflation in recent years.⁴⁴

Two adults working full time (forty hours per week for fifty weeks per year) at today's minimum wage of \$15.50 together earn \$62,000 per year—\$22,600 short of what's required to cover the bills—forcing painful trade-offs among necessities. San Joaquin Valley residents working full-time minimum-wage jobs face economic stress that never lets up. Week in, week out, they must choose which bills to pay,

because they can't pay them all—do they keep the lights on, or replace a blown-out tire on the car that gets them to work? Do they get their daughter a pair of glasses so that she can see the blackboard, or pay for vitally important medication for their elderly father?

To reach \$84,600, each adult would have to work nearly fifteen additional hours per week—a fifty-five-hour workweek—and neither could miss a single day for illness or emergency, for a doctor's appointment, a funeral, or a school play. The situation is more punishing still for single parents. A single parent of two children would have to work more than 100 hours per week at minimum wage to provide the bare-bones basics for her family. Three out of four single mothers fall below the Real Cost Measure threshold.

Black and Latino families in the San Joaquin Valley disproportionately lack sufficient incomes to cover life necessities. About half of all Black and Latino families fell short of the Real Cost Measure threshold in 2019. Families with a child under age 6 also disproportionately struggle; nearly two in three households with young children don't have enough income to cover essential costs.⁴⁵



Family of Four
COST OF LIVING

\$84,600

NEED



Two Full-Time Workers
COMBINED MINIMUM WAGES

\$62,000

EARN

\$22,600
OUTSTANDING



Two minimum-wage earners (\$15.50) each need to work at least a 55-hour week to cover their family's basic expenses in the San Joaquin Valley.

A single parent must work more than 100 hours per week to make ends meet.

BOX 17 The Fresno D.R.I.V.E. Initiative

(Developing the Region's Inclusive and Vibrant Economy)

The Fresno D.R.I.V.E. Initiative is a decade-long community investment plan drafted with input from a 300-person steering committee representing over 150 civic, community, and business organizations in the greater Fresno region. It was sponsored by The Central Valley Community Foundation (CVCF) with support from the James Irvine Foundation.

In 2019, the D.R.I.V.E. coalition worked to assess baseline data on Fresno's economy, human capital, and neighborhoods; create a shared ten-year vision for inclusive economic development; identify the key actions and investments needed to achieve the ten-year

vision; and forecast the community impact of those investments. The effort focused not just on closing economic gaps between groups and but equally on increasing racial equity and inclusion in the region. It identified eighteen investment priorities in three areas—economic development, human capital, and neighborhood revitalization. The investment plan can be found here: <https://www.fresnodrive.org>. This important work, which we have drawn upon in the recommendations section of this report, is essential reading for those seeking to expand access to opportunity in the San Joaquin Valley.

Housing

The events of recent years showed more clearly than ever why housing is a critical human development issue. More than just a place to lay our heads at night, housing is a fulcrum of opportunity. Where we live governs which jobs we can easily access, the quality of the air we breathe, how vulnerable we are to the effects of climate change or pandemics, and much more. Stable, affordable housing free of hazards such as asthma-inducing fumes, peeling paint, or fraying electrical wires is particularly important for the youngest San Joaquin Valley residents, whose health and safety are compromised by poor housing conditions, whose school outcomes and emotional health are put at risk by the instability of frequent moves, and whose development is threatened when financial insecurity and overcrowding create debilitating stress in the household.

The centrality of housing to well-being means that the scarcity of affordable housing in the San Joaquin Valley shapes residents' choices and opportunities in numerous ways. The lack of affordable housing entrenches generational and racial inequities and limits poor children's access to high-quality public schools. Funding affordable housing, preserving and acquiring affordable units, and providing rental subsidies and services to vulnerable populations—such as people experiencing homelessness, seniors on fixed incomes, people with disabilities, young people aging out of foster care, people with mental illness, people with very low earnings, and formerly incarcerated people—are necessary to ensure that all in the Valley can live with safety, dignity, and stability.

Home values and the cost of housing in the San Joaquin Valley have been, and remain, low relative to other areas in California; however, incomes are also comparatively low, meaning that affordability is as much a challenge for owners and renters in the Valley as it is for people elsewhere in the state.⁴⁶

Research by the California Housing Partnership paints a stark picture of the affordability challenge facing low-income renters in the eight counties that make up the San Joaquin Valley (see **SIDEBAR**). In Fresno, Kern, San Joaquin, and Stanislaus Counties, three in four extremely low-income households spend more than half their income on housing costs; in Madera County, seven in ten such households do; and in Kings, Merced, and Tulare Counties, two in three such households do. Compare these figures to the share of the Valley's moderate-income households that pay more than half their incomes on housing costs: 4 percent or fewer.⁴⁷ Over 120,000 low-income rental households in the San Joaquin Valley did not have access to a home they could afford in 2021.



Where we live governs which jobs we can easily access, the quality of the air we breathe, how vulnerable we are to the effects of climate change or pandemics, and much more.

COUNTY	POOREST HOUSEHOLDS SPENDING MORE THAN ½ INCOME ON HOUSING (PERCENT)	LOW-INCOME RENTER HOUSEHOLDS WITHOUT AFFORDABLE HOUSING (NUMBER)
Fresno	74%	36,523
Kern	75%	25,550
Kings	66%	4,088
Madera	70%	3,847
Merced	66%	6,709
San Joaquin	77%	19,078
Stanislaus	76%	15,485
Tulare	67%	11,317
Total		122,597

BOX 18 Homelessness

Homelessness in California is driven by a number of factors, chief among them the state's outsized housing costs and related lack of affordable housing. And homelessness has been exacerbated nationwide by Covid-19 and the resulting increase in unemployment and public health restrictions on shelter capacity.

From 2020 to 2022, the San Joaquin Valley—like the rest of California—outpaced the nation in rising levels of homelessness. From 2020 to 2022, homelessness rose less than 1 percent nationally, but 6 percent in California, and 12 percent in the San Joaquin Valley.⁴⁸ In 2022, 12,085 people in the San Joaquin Valley were homeless, of whom 5,527 were sheltered and 6,558 were unsheltered.⁴⁹

By county, homelessness increased the most in San Joaquin and Merced (49 percent and 34 percent, respectively) but actually decreased in Kings/Tulare⁵⁰ and Stanislaus (5 percent and 12 percent, respectively). Consistent with national trends, Black residents are overrepresented among

homeless individuals in the San Joaquin Valley.⁵¹ Latinos make up 42 percent of homeless individuals (5,031 people) and Black residents make up 16 percent (1,882 people). San Joaquin County has the highest share of homeless residents who are Black, at 22 percent.

Homelessness is linked to affordable housing availability. In the San Joaquin

Valley, 73 percent of low-income households spend over half of their income on housing,⁵² as average monthly rent ranges from \$1,000 per month in Madera to \$1,600 per month in San Joaquin County.⁵³ Concerted local efforts to reduce homelessness are taking place. In 2021, San Joaquin County completed

219 permanent housing units and began construction for 788 new shelter beds.⁵⁴ As of July 2021, \$36 million had been allocated to the San Joaquin Valley through Project HomeKey—funding to acquire properties to permanently house previously homeless Californians.⁵⁵

Homelessness in California is driven by a number of factors, chief among them the state's outsized housing costs and related lack of affordable housing.



BOX 19 Farmworkers in the San Joaquin Valley

The San Joaquin Valley contains some of the most productive agricultural land on the planet. California received \$51.1 billion for its agricultural products in 2021. The San Joaquin Valley alone contributed 77 percent of that total: \$39.4 billion in agricultural commodities.⁵⁶ Farming and linked industries provide roughly 14 percent of the Valley's GDP, 17 percent of its employment, and 19 percent of revenues. Agriculture employs around 340,000 people, including those employed in full- and part-time capacities, as well as contractors.⁵⁷ Despite their central role in cultivating crops and tending livestock, California farmworkers experience substandard—sometimes unsafe and illegal—working conditions and face significant barriers to living healthy and economically secure lives.

Reliable information on farmworkers in California, and in the San Joaquin Valley specifically, is hard to come by. A recent Farmworker Health Study from UC Merced indicates many areas of pressing need, including: two-thirds of farmworkers have struggled paying for food or bills since the pandemic; half have been without health insurance in the last year; one in four have at least one chronic health condition; one in five reported wage theft by employers; and one in six said that wildfire smoke “often” or “very often” made it difficult to breathe.⁵⁸

California-specific findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey, most recently updated in 2019, add more context. Farmworkers reported an average hourly wage of \$12.13 and a median personal income between \$20,000 and \$24,999. About seven in

ten farmworkers are male. Ninety-six percent of California agriculture workers are Latino, and approximately eight in ten were born in Mexico. Thirty-five percent of farmworkers live in overcrowded housing. Roughly half of California farmworkers are authorized to work in the United States. Regardless of work authorization status, over 80 percent of workers are settled and have lived in America for at least ten years.⁵⁹

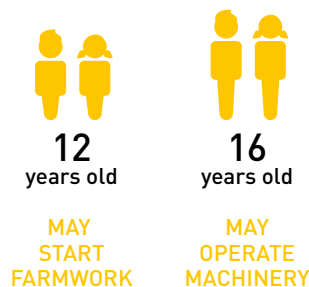
Regardless of work authorization status, over 80 percent of workers are settled and have lived in America for at least ten years.

In 2020, 38 percent of California farmworkers reported first working in agriculture at age 18 or younger.⁶⁰ Notably, child labor regulations are significantly laxer in the agriculture sector than in virtually all other industries. In California, children can begin working on farms outside school hours at age 12 and may operate machinery and work in potentially

hazardous conditions at age 16.⁶¹ Children die working in agriculture at far higher rates than those working in other industries, and are likely injured or sickened at higher rates too.⁶²

Environmental hazards in the San Joaquin Valley directly impact farmworkers. The region has some of the highest air pollution levels in the country. Particulate pollution in the Valley stems from automotive emissions, fuel combustion, wildfire smoke, windblown dust, and dust from farm operations and transport. Climate change and water scarcity will likely lead to drier and more dust-prone land, exacerbating particulate emissions at the source. Cases of particulate-pollution-linked asthma and similar respiratory illnesses are elevated in the Valley.⁶³ An additional hazard comes in the form of pesticide use: high levels of pesticide exposure have been found to increase adverse birth outcomes in the Valley.⁶⁴ Farmworkers have been severely sickened by pesticide use in the Valley in the past.⁶⁵ One in three California farmworkers claimed respirators were not provided, but felt they were “always” needed when working in agriculture.⁶⁶

The wages and working conditions of farmworkers have long been an area of concern in California. Though earnings and conditions have improved, most farmworkers—the people on whom a huge component of the San Joaquin Valley's economy depends—still earn too little, work in unsafe conditions, and are missing societal and regulatory support commensurate with their dignity as human beings, let alone the key role they play in supporting a major driver of the regional economy.



Recommendations

This report was developed by Measure of America in collaboration with an engaged group of advisors and funders, who are listed in the acknowledgments. The recommendations below drew upon their guidance as well as the work of numerous organizations and a host of regional planning exercises.

The stark well-being differences by race and ethnicity, by gender, and by place across the San Joaquin Valley are rooted in interlinked social and economic inequities that together limit the life chances of some while easing the paths of others. Addressing thorny structural issues like gender inequality, racism, and residential segregation is a complex challenge but one that is required to make the California dream a reality for all who call the Valley home. Expanding well-being requires short-term action focused on continued Covid-19 recovery, medium-term action aimed at building human security, and a long-term commitment to addressing structural inequalities.

MITIGATE THE HEALTH, EDUCATIONAL, AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF COVID-19 BY FOCUSING ON THE MOST VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

Addressing Covid-19's harmful health, educational, and economic impacts is a top short-term priority. Black, Latino, and Native American people and low-income communities were hardest hit by the pandemic; they were more likely to work in frontline jobs where they could be exposed to Covid-19, more likely to live in intergenerational or overcrowded homes, and more likely to have underlying health conditions that make the coronavirus more dangerous. Farmworkers and their families were particularly hard hit.

The HDI scores by census tract and demographic group presented in this report create a map of vulnerability; low scores flag areas and groups that were already grappling with threats to their health, access to education, and economic security pre-Covid-19, that were most affected by the pandemic, and that face the steepest climb to recovery. **Targeting recovery efforts and dollars toward the 213 Valley census tracts with HDI scores below 3.0 will prioritize those who struggled the most before the pandemic and who need the most assistance in rebuilding their lives now.** These priority communities will benefit the most from philanthropic and government investment.

Expanding well-being requires short-term action focused on Covid-19 recovery, medium-term action aimed at building human security, and a long-term commitment to addressing structural inequalities.

BUILD HUMAN SECURITY THROUGH INVESTMENTS IN HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND INCOME

The pandemic made clear that our thin, frayed safety net is inadequate to guard against chronic threats like unemployment and health problems as well as sudden disasters like disease outbreaks and wildfires. Investing in systems and services that allow people to care for themselves and their families during both normal and challenging times is critical to well-being.

Adding funding to strengthen social supports and infrastructure is one part of the solution, but ensuring that these resources reach those most in need doesn't stop there. Vulnerable populations can struggle to locate, access, and coordinate physical, mental, and behavioral health services, income supports, workforce training, housing assistance, and more. Expanding navigation and coordination services can help people identify and access sources of assistance in ways that are more efficient, effective, and people-centered than a siloed approach. A one-stop-shop for wraparound services and support—requiring substantial coordination behind the scenes—would do a lot to help the populations that social services are meant to benefit. Universal basic income and similar proposals show promise for providing flexible, sustainable, and useful government support; research and evidence on these programs (including one in Stockton) are detailed on **pages 160–161** of *Portrait of California 2021–2022*.

Address health disparities magnified by the Covid-19 pandemic. Underlying health conditions like heart disease, hypertension, and diabetes increase the risk of complications and death from Covid-19. Communities of color, who suffer disproportionately from these conditions, have borne the brunt of the pandemic. Attentiveness to Covid-19's outsized impact on Black, Native American, and Latino residents; on people living in poverty; and on older Californians will offer critical lessons as the state recovers. The low life expectancies among Native American men (66.2 years), Black men (67.8 years), Native American women (73.5 years), and Black women (73.6 years) in the Valley indicate that underlying health conditions that heighten Covid-19 vulnerabilities are not receiving the attention and treatment required. A serious challenge is the relative scarcity of health-care providers of all sorts in the Valley; though rates vary by county, the region overall has some of the lowest ratios of licensed doctors, nurses, marriage and family therapists, counselors, and social workers per 100,000 population in California. Expanding and retaining the region's health professions workforce is a critical priority. In the United Kingdom, personal and family tax incentives have been proposed to retain desperately needed health-care workers; a similar approach might bolster the medical workforce in the San Joaquin Valley. A regionwide goal should be that every resident of the San Joaquin Valley receives at least one appointment or check-in with a medical professional each year. Preventative care saves lives and resources.

Investing in systems and services that allow people to care for themselves and their families during both normal and challenging times is critical to well-being.

Invest in the care and education of the youngest Valley residents. High-quality, affordable early-care and education programs are essential for San Joaquin Valley residents. Without reliable childcare, parents cannot support their families, and businesses struggle to find workers. In addition, high-quality early care and education can foster the healthy development of the region's smallest residents. High-quality care enhances the social, emotional, and cognitive development of young children—particularly children living in poverty; key to quality is the educational background of care providers. Quality care can alleviate parents' stress by bringing them into contact with people, services, and organizations who can support them. Today, there are far too few affordable, high-quality care spots to meet this need; in fact, childcare is the largest household expense in all but five California counties (all in the Bay Area), outstripping housing and other expenses.⁶⁷ This crucial window in child development and future educational and economic opportunity needs more state and local resources than it has received to date.

Make educational equality a reality for K–12 students. Children growing up in disadvantaged circumstances need schools with the expertise and resources to provide high-quality academic instruction; a safe, healthy, respectful, and nonpunitive environment; and support, both during and out of normal school hours, for at-risk children and children exhibiting dropout warning signs. The starkly different graduation rates across the Valley's high schools are a cause and consequence of social and economic inequality, particularly poverty, residential segregation by race and income, and uneven access to experienced teachers.⁶⁸ The gaps between low- and high-income students and between white and Latino and Black students have widened as a result of the pandemic. Targeting recovery dollars and programs to the schools and students struggling the most before the pandemic and most harmed by its effects is critical.

Support diverse pathways to meaningful careers. Young people in low-income rural and urban areas tend to face disproportionate challenges in the transition to adulthood. In much of the San Joaquin Valley, roughly one in five young people between the ages of 16 and 24 are neither working nor in school, a group known as disconnected or opportunity youth.⁶⁹ Measures like apprenticeship and mentoring programs can help young people successfully navigate the school-to-work transition by providing support, relevant instruction, and a clear end goal. Countries like Germany, the Netherlands, and the Nordics create youth-friendly economies with multiple well-structured pathways leading from school to career. Workforce development systems in these countries rely on apprenticeship programs (often funded at least in part by industry), worker training programs, and specialized high schools to help people develop the skills they need for long-term, sustainable careers—not just in manufacturing and skilled trades but also in sectors like tourism and renewable energy, including solar energy, which holds great promise for the Valley's future.

Make higher education “student ready” rather than focusing just on making young people “college ready.” The higher education system was built around the needs of recent high school graduates who were largely white and middle-class,

The starkly different graduation rates across the Valley's high schools are a cause and consequence of social and economic inequality.

attending school full-time, living on campus, financially dependent on their parents, and lacking significant caregiving responsibilities. Nationwide, fewer than one in five college students today meet this description.⁷⁰ Today's college students are more likely than in the past to be people of color, attending college part-time while working full- or part-time, and parenting or otherwise caring for others. The Valley's colleges and universities must continue to adapt their model to provide accommodations like flexible schedules, childcare, easy parking, and advising informed by the realities of students' lives.

Improve wages and close gender and racial wage gaps. California has led the nation in increasing the minimum wage, and doing so was crucial for improving the standard of living of the lowest-paid Californians. But more is needed. This higher minimum still does not cover the cost of living in most parts of the San Joaquin Valley, and many workers are exempt from minimum-wage requirements. In addition, wage gaps by race and ethnicity and by gender imperil the well-being of families across the region. Increasing economic security for low-income workers by raising wages, strengthening equal-pay protections, and protecting the right to unionize are important priorities. Universal basic income pilots have shown promise.

Treat high-speed broadband as a public utility akin to electricity. In the age of coronavirus, high-speed broadband can no longer be treated as an optional luxury. Gaps in internet access have created an opportunity chasm between the broadband haves and have-nots. Remote learning, working from home, and seeing a doctor virtually—the new normal for many in the San Joaquin Valley—are only possible with fast, reliable internet. Not all “broadband” is created equal; stakeholders in this space should coordinate around a minimum speed threshold of 100 Mbps, laid out in a summer 2020 executive order by Governor Gavin Newsom. This speed, which is recommended for digital learning, far exceeds the Federal Communications Commission's broadband definition.⁷¹ Even as the threat of Covid-19 ebbs, broadband will remain critical for job searches, school projects, accessing public benefits of all sorts, and myriad other important tasks. Closing the digital divide with infrastructure, affordable services, and skill-building will promote equity and inclusion for everyone. The California 2021 Broadband for All bill, which authorized the investment of \$6 billion in universal statewide broadband access, was a welcome step, and the Middle-Mile Broadband Initiative provided funding to areas of Fresno and Kern Counties and is evaluating broader connectivity across the Valley.⁷² Government officials from the Valley's eight counties and numerous municipalities and longtime broadband advocates still have an important role to play in ensuring expansion with equity—making sure that everyone in the county benefits from this statewide investment. Access gaps will not magically close once the infrastructure is in place, though that's a critical first step; low-income families may need assistance paying for services and devices as well as training and support.

Dramatically increase the supply of housing and end homelessness.

Affordable housing is increasingly out of reach for low-income Valley residents, and the rate of housing construction is far from sufficient to mitigate rising prices or meet demand. In the popular imagination, the California housing crisis is centered in cities, where limited land, sky-high costs, NIMBY-ism, and restrictive regulations conspire to make building affordable housing near impossible. Yet rural areas in the state also face a housing shortage. State funding formulas prioritize urban areas, private developers aren't able to realize economies of scale because rural populations are small and often spread out, existing infrastructure is often inadequate, and rural residents disproportionately live in poverty, making even "affordable" housing unaffordable to many. Public funding is necessary to expand access to affordable housing given the obstacles to private development and the higher-than-average poverty rates across the Valley. Keeping people in their homes by providing rental subsidies and services, supporting human-centered, trauma-informed street engagement rather than criminalization, and pursuing a "housing first" strategy are all key to addressing homelessness. Comprehensively addressing the root causes of housing unaffordability and insecurity is necessary as well.

Improve the well-being of farmworkers. The counties of the San Joaquin Valley are some of the most agriculturally productive areas on Earth, yet they are also among the poorest in California. Kern, Tulare, and Fresno Counties each produced crops worth more than \$8 billion in 2021, yet all three rank in the bottom third of California counties in terms of median personal earnings and in the bottom two quintiles of all counties in the United States; residents of Fresno typically earn \$30,600; in Kern, \$30,000; and in Tulare, \$27,900. This obvious inequity calls out for redress—the industry is built on scarce and dwindling resources and the precarity of its labor force. These essential workers require the same protections that most other workers in America already have—fair pay, fair working conditions, an end to child-labor exploitation, employer-provided health care, protection from occupational hazards, freedom from fear of deportation and family separation, and gainful employment opportunities during off-peak seasons.

Natural bounty can be a positive force for development, but fair wages and conditions are needed to unlock its full human development potential for working communities. Those who form the backbone of the agricultural labor force deserve the opportunity to lead healthy lives, have a decent standard of living, and build a better future for themselves and their families.

Promote investments in a green-economy future for the Valley. Agriculture has been and will continue to be a mainstay of life in the San Joaquin Valley. But water scarcity demands serious changes. To reach groundwater conservation goals set by California's 2014 Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, large portions of active farmland will need to be taken out of irrigated production. Some estimates suggest that regulations will require removing 500,000 acres—10

percent of current irrigated cropland—from production in the Valley by 2040.⁷³ There is considerable potential for synergy between groundwater conservation efforts and solar energy development efforts. Previously irrigated farmland removed from production to reduce water demand could be the site of utility-scale solar developments. In addition, landowners will be increasingly looking for productive alternatives to idle or “fallowed” land, and water-limited and dryland crop production are a promising option. While fallowed land produces dust, weeds, and pests, winter wheat or other forage crops can be grown sustainably with a small amount of irrigation, and California’s beef and dairy industries could provide a steady source of demand.⁷⁴ Canola, beets, chickpeas, and leafy greens can be grown during the rainy winter season or as dryland crops. These crops retain more water than idle land; generate fewer dust emissions than summer or permanent crops, improving air quality; and are compatible with other sustainable practices like cover cropping, residue management, and weed control. While people may assume that idle land consumes no water, both idle and water-limited crops use water, but a water-limited crop results in a usable output.⁷⁵ Newly fallowed land could also be turned into wetlands, riparian (streamside) habitats, and uplands (drier, arid grasslands), which will help recharge groundwater, protect communities from flood risk, bring outdoor recreation to a parks-poor area, and bring new jobs in restoration work.⁷⁶ Prior efforts to reestablish vegetation were successful because of dedicated and sustained funding.⁷⁷

Solar energy production offers great potential. The Valley’s counties rank in the top 5 percent of all US counties for sunshine, making them ideal for utility-scale solar development projects.⁷⁸ Solar development in the region is expected to more than double between 2020 and 2030. By 2045, the San Joaquin Valley could make up between 30 percent and 40 percent of statewide solar energy capacity, roughly ten times the current amount.⁷⁹

These developments will offer new opportunities for the San Joaquin Valley while also addressing climate change. It is imperative, however, to ensure that the economic benefits of green-economy transitions also benefit the farmworker communities who have been tilling the land for generations; these San Joaquin Valley residents should have priority access to training and well-paying, secure jobs in the sector.

San Joaquin Valley Human Development Index by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity

RANK	HDI	LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH (years)	LESS THAN HIGH SCHOOL (% of adults 25+)	AT LEAST BACHELOR'S DEGREE (% of adults 25+)	GRADUATE OR PROFESSIONAL DEGREE (% of adults 25+)	SCHOOL ENROLLMENT (% ages 3 to 24)	MEDIAN EARNINGS (\$)	HEALTH INDEX	EDUCATION INDEX	INCOME INDEX
California	5.85	81.1	15.5	37.1	14.3	77.2	39,900	6.27	5.45	5.81
San Joaquin Valley	4.31	78.2	23.9	18.0	5.8	76.3	31,100	5.08	3.77	4.08
GENDER										
1 Women	4.32	81.0	22.7	19.1	6.1	77.8	25,500	6.24	4.03	2.70
2 Men	4.19	75.6	25.1	16.8	5.5	74.8	35,900	4.00	3.50	5.07
RACE/ETHNICITY										
1 Asian	5.55	82.1	20.1	33.5	10.9	80.2	34,100	6.71	5.22	4.72
2 White	5.18	76.5	9.3	25.3	8.8	77.1	42,300	4.35	4.96	6.22
3 NHOPI	4.17	73.9	12.4	18.6	4.8*	84.6	31,400	3.31	5.05	4.14
4 Latino	3.87	80.9	38.7	8.6	2.1	75.7	26,300	6.22	2.47	2.91
5 Black	3.32	70.6	13.6	17.9	7.1	71.5	31,600	1.93	3.83	4.19
6 Native American	2.67	70.2	19.5	12.7	3.6*	73.6	26,200	1.73	3.37	2.90
GENDER AND RACE/ETHNICITY										
1 Asian Women	5.72	84.9	20.9	34.6	10.6	82.0	30,300	7.87	5.40	3.89
2 Asian Men	5.35	79.1	19.2	32.2	11.2	78.5	38,500		5.06	5.56
3 White Men	5.22	73.9	9.6	24.9	8.8	75.8	51,600	3.28	4.80	7.59
4 White Women	5.03	79.1	9.0	25.8	8.9	78.5	33,100	5.47	5.13	4.50
5 NHOPI Women	4.21	77.5	10.9	19.1	5.4*	81.3	26,600	4.79	4.85	2.98
6 Latina Women	3.91	84.2	37.0	9.8	2.4	77.3	21,100	7.57	2.77	1.39
7 Black Women	3.76	73.6	11.9	19.5	7.8	74.9	29,700	3.18	4.33	3.77
8 Latino Men	3.72	77.9	40.4	7.5	1.8	74.2	30,800	4.96	2.19	4.01
9 Black Men	2.96	67.8	15.2	16.4	6.4	68.6	34,300	0.76	3.38	4.75
10 Native American Women	2.72	73.5	21.1	12.7	2.9*	68.3	23,900	3.14	2.77*	2.25
11 Native American Men	2.51	66.2	17.9	12.6	4.3*	77.9	28,900	0.08	3.88	3.56
NHOPI Men			14.4	18.0	4.1*	87.6	40,900		5.19	5.97

DATA SOURCES:

Life expectancy: Measure of America calculations using mortality data from the California Department of Public Health, 2014–2020.

Education and earnings: US Census Bureau PUMS, 2016–2020.

*Estimates with an asterisk have a higher degree of uncertainty.

Notes

See the Methodological Note in *A Portrait of California 2021–2022* for an overview of this report's methodology.

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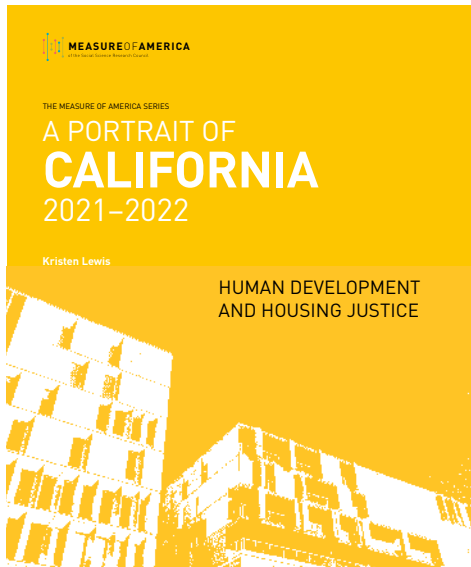
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A PORTRAIT OF THE VALLEY

SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2023

A COMPANION TO A PORTRAIT OF **CALIFORNIA** 2021–2022



A Portrait of California 2021–2022 uses the American Human Development Index, a measure that distills **health**, **education**, and **earnings** indicators into a single gauge of well-being, in order to measure and track real progress in quality of life and the opportunities available to all Californians. This regional report shines a spotlight on the San Joaquin Valley.

Within this *Portrait*, readers will find analysis informed by the Index focused on places (region, counties, census tracts) as well as demographic groups (gender and race and ethnicity). The *Portrait* also contains special features on housing, homelessness, environmental justice, farmworkers, and the Covid-19 pandemic.

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“Studies like this one prove to be invaluable tools for policymakers to understand how the state has changed over time—to know, using data, who has been left behind and how to better serve communities in need.”

Toni G. Atkins, California Senate President pro Tempore

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Measure of America is a nonpartisan project of the nonprofit Social Science Research Council. It creates easy-to-use and methodologically sound tools for understanding well-being and opportunity in America and stimulates fact-based dialogue about these issues. Through reports, interactive maps, online tools, custom-built dashboards, community engagement, and commissioned research, Measure of America works closely with partners to breathe life into numbers, using data to identify areas of need, build consensus about priorities, pinpoint levers for change, and track progress over time.

Kristen Lewis is the director of Measure of America and author or coauthor of The Measure of America series of national, state, county, and city reports.

ABOUT THE REPORT

A Portrait of California 2021–2022 is an exploration of how **California residents are faring**. It examines well-being and access to opportunity using the human development framework and index, presenting American Human Development Index scores for California places and demographic groups and examines a range of critical issues, including health, education, living standards, housing, homelessness, residential segregation, and inequality.

ABOUT THE DESIGN

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