

CHILD POVERTY IN CALIFORNIA

Sarah Bohn and Matt Levin

► **Child poverty rates continue to rise even as the state economy recovers.**

After reaching a two-decade low of about 16% in 2001, the child poverty rate in California has been trending upward. The Great Recession accelerated the increase: by 2011, nearly 1 in 4 children was living in poverty in California (24.3%). That's slightly more than 2 million children, by official measures. Poverty among California's children is much higher than it is among working-age adults (15.6%) and seniors (8.2%).

► **Child poverty is lower now than at its early 1990s peak.**

Despite the severity of the recent recession, a smaller percentage of children in California are in poverty than during the recession of the early 1990s—in 1994 the child poverty rate reached a high of 28%. But while the state's economy continued to improve in 2011, it is not yet clear whether the child poverty rate had peaked.

► **The trend in child poverty is similar in both California and the rest of the nation.**

Since 2001, the rate of child poverty has been holding relatively steady or climbing in both California and the rest of the U.S. During the Great Recession, poverty among children increased across the country, but by 2011 the child poverty rate in the rest of the nation was 21.4%, slightly lower than California's rate.

► **Latino and African American children have higher poverty rates than other groups.**

California's child poverty rates for Latinos (31.2%) and African Americans (33.4%) are much higher than the rates among Asians (13.2%) and whites (10.1%). However, in the rest of the country, poverty rates among Latino and African American children are even higher (35.2% and 39.3%, respectively). Child poverty rates are significantly higher in families with a least one foreign-born parent than in families with only American-born parents (29.1% vs. 17.4%). But most poor children in California are U.S.-born (91.3%), and the majority (64.3%) are U.S.-born Latinos.

► **Poverty rates are particularly high among single-mother and less-educated families.**

Poverty rates are higher for children living with single mothers (45.7%) than for those in married-couple families (15.5%) or with a single father (30.0%). In the rest of the nation, the child poverty rate in single-mother families is even higher (49.0%). Most poor children (in terms of absolute numbers, not the rate of poverty) are part of married-couple families. The child poverty rate in families where neither parent has a high school diploma is high in California (48.5%), but not as high as in the rest of the country (54.8%).

► **Most poor children are in working families.**

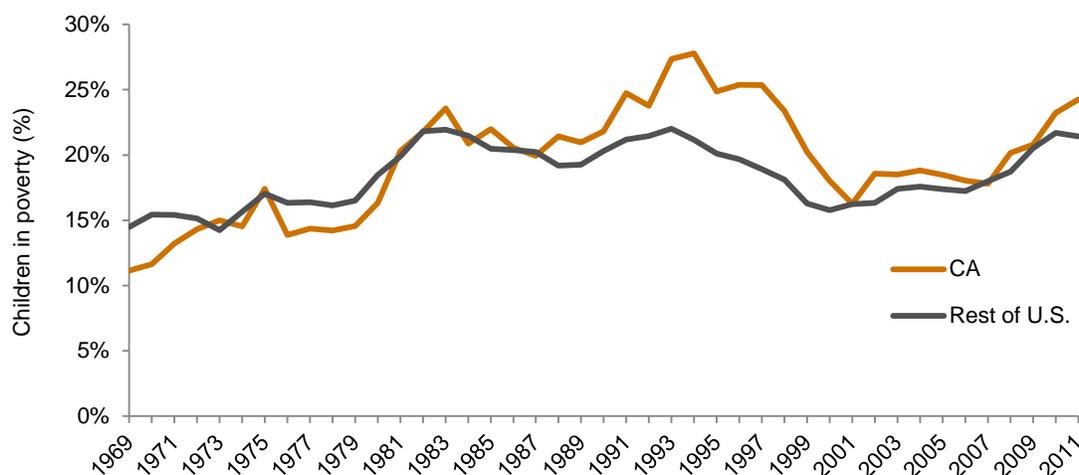
Sixty-one percent of poor children live in families where one or both parents are working: 36.7% of poor children have at least one parent working full time and an additional 24% have a parent working part time. The rate of poor children with working parents has shrunk significantly since the Great Recession. In 2006, 77% of poor children were in working families.

► **Child poverty varies considerably across California, and is lower in the Bay Area.**

San Francisco Bay Area counties typically have lower child poverty rates than the rest of the state, with eight Bay Area counties (San Mateo, Marin, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, San Francisco, Contra Costa, Alameda, and Sonoma) in the bottom quarter of child poverty rates statewide. By contrast, several Central Valley counties (Fresno, Tulare, Merced, Kings, Kern, Madera, and Stanislaus) have the highest rates in California (at 28.7% or higher). Nearly 30% of poor children in California live in Los Angeles County.



California’s child poverty rate has yet to improve, unlike the rate in the rest of the nation



Source: Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

Child poverty rates vary widely across California’s counties

County or county group	Child poverty rate (%)	County or county group	Child poverty rate (%)
Merced	40.6	Colusa, Glenn, Tehama, Trinity	21.7
Fresno	36.4	Shasta	21.7
Tulare	36.3	Yolo	21.3
Lake, Mendocino	35.2	Solano	20.8
Kern	35.0	San Diego	19.6
Imperial	32.7	San Luis Obispo	19.2
Stanislaus	32.4	Santa Barbara	19.0
Madera	30.7	Orange	18.4
Del Norte, Lassen, Modoc, Siskiyou	29.0	Ventura	16.8
Kings	28.7	Sonoma	16.1
Butte	26.4	Alameda	15.8
Los Angeles	26.3	Contra Costa	15.6
Sutter, Yuba	26.0	San Francisco	15.4
San Joaquin	25.2	Santa Cruz	14.3
Sacramento	25.2	El Dorado	14.2
Humboldt	24.7	Nevada, Plumas, Sierra	12.7
San Bernardino	24.6	Santa Clara	12.2
Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Inyo, Mariposa, Mono, Tuolumne	22.6	Marin	10.5
Riverside	22.1	Placer	9.7
Monterey, San Benito	22.0	San Mateo	8.6
Napa	21.9		

Source: American Community Survey, 2011.

Note: For some counties, poverty rates cannot be calculated individually and are thus grouped with nearby counties.

Sources: American Community Survey (2011) for demographic and geographic breakdown, Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (1970–2012) for trends, both from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Contact: bohn@ppic.org, levin@ppic.org