

RACE COUNTS

# RACE COUNTS:

**Advancing Opportunities  
For All Californians**

**WINTER 2017**



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**“WHEN YOU RUN ALONE, YOU RUN FAST.  
WHEN YOU RUN TOGETHER, YOU RUN FAR.”**  
**—ZAMBIAN PROVERB**

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# INTRODUCTION

**California is at a turning point—one that has been 50 years in the making.**

**IN 1968,** California officially declared itself the “Golden State.” We gave our state that nickname not just because of our natural resources but also because of the major investments we had made in our K–12 schools, our higher education system, and our overall infrastructure as our state’s population grew by leaps and bounds after the turn of the century.

But this promise, this aspiration of what we could be as a state, rang hollow for many Californians. In particular, low-income communities of color and Indigenous communities were left out of this larger vision of California and saw many of these big investments in the state’s future simply pass them by. Looking back now, it was our state’s unwillingness to resolve this fundamental contradiction of equal access to California’s Promise that over the decades led our public institutions to become engines of widening racial disparities.

Given this contradiction, we eventually saw a wholesale retreat from that dream of the Golden State as investments in our public services grew smaller in relation to the needs of the state’s growing and much more diverse population. This retreat caused the most critical trend lines to shift in the wrong direction. We saw worsening educational outcomes and the rise of the mass-incarceration state. We witnessed the shredding of the social safety net and crumbling infrastructure which hit low-income communities of color and Indigenous groups the hardest.

Through the hate-filled, immigrant-bashing rhetoric and politics of the 1990s and the passage of state propositions like 187, 209, and 227, California continued to fall further away from the earlier dream of the Golden State until we reached the crisis of the Great Recession. Finally, in the late 2000s, California found itself at the precipice of political and financial meltdown—we were 43rd in the nation in per-pupil spending, our jails were woefully overcrowded, and we had a structural budget deficit so wide that you could drive another state’s entire budget through it.

In the end, it was the very people and communities the state had spent decades under-educating, over-criminalizing, and otherwise shutting out from the California Dream who stepped up and saved it from the brink of failure. For within the past few decades, the state has seen a new arrangement of power between elected officials, labor partners, and newly-formed statewide alliances of community organizers working to turn things around for this state. This rising tide of community organizations and organizers not only helped to save the state from financial collapse, not only helped to pass other critical reforms in our education and criminal justice systems, but has also given us another shot at living into our destiny as a state.

But even as we watch this turnaround in California’s fortunes, we find that the ghosts of the past are still very much with us. Antiquated systems and policies continue to produce very disparate outcomes for communities of color and Indigenous

**WE HOPE TO SPARK CONVERSATIONS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL, WITH THE COMMUNITIES MOST IMPACTED BY THESE INJUSTICES LEADING THE WAY.**

peoples. This report, as a part of the launch of the larger RACE COUNTS initiative, confirms the pervasive nature of racial disparities in every county and across seven issue areas critical to California’s future. This work confirms that while we may have become a solidly “blue state” we are far from being a “blue paradise”—particularly for people of color and Indigenous people. But this work is not just about describing how bad things are—it was also designed to help point a way forward. We aim to help each county in the state to understand its unique challenges, to show where it is starting from, and to point it toward the direction it should be moving to improve both its overall performance and also lower critical racial disparities.

With the launch of the overall RACE COUNTS initiative, we are hoping to open the space for new, more fact-based, constructive conversations around race and racial disparities throughout the state. We hope to spark conversations at the local level, with the communities most impacted by these injustices leading the way.

We are proud that after over 18 months of collaboration and discussion with over 100 social justice organizations throughout the state, we are able to present this report, the companion website—RACECOUNTS.org—and a community-oriented training curriculum to help move those conversations forward.

Now is the time for these conversations and for California to finally address that fundamental contradiction that has plagued our state for the past 50 years. This is not just because our current role in national politics—as the hotbed of the so-called “Resistance”—requires us to address the injustice within our own borders. Rather, it’s because next year, in 2018, it will be 50 years since our decision to assume the mantle of the “Golden State.” On that anniversary, we will be once again faced with the central question of who benefits from the state’s lofty vision—and who is left out. Half a century later, we finally have a shot to reclaim California’s promise, and truly become the Golden State for everyone.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

California has long been known as a beacon for progressive politics: a land of hope and promise—dubbed the “Golden State” 50 years ago in 1968. But for many communities of color and Indigenous people, this idealistic vision of California has never been the reality. Acknowledging these facts does not mean giving up on the possibility of a fair and inclusive California, however: we have the responsibility to step up and achieve our state’s promise for all Californians.

Today, it’s clear that race continues to be a major predictor of success and life chances. This is not simply a question of history: race-based injustice is a daily presence in the lives of Californians of color and Indigenous communities. Our initiative—RACE COUNTS—uses race as the primary lens for understanding racial disparities and focuses on systemic racism—the way that racism has been embedded in our public political, economic, and social systems to subordinate people of color and Indigenous peoples. Our key aim is to change the conversation—both inside government and out—through increasing understanding of the toll systemic racism continues to take on our communities and advancing policies to eradicate it. Only by putting race squarely on the table can we rise to the challenge that now confronts us and help California’s next 50 years be ones of equity and justice.

The RACE COUNTS initiative is built around a comprehensive, cutting-edge tool that tracks three dimensions of racial equity: performance, racial disparity, and impact. Performance is assessed by how well or poorly a county’s population scores on a particular indicator. Racial disparity is measured by how far each racial group is from the group with the best performance. Impact is indicated by the size of the county’s population. The tool compares and ranks counties across 44 indicators in seven key issue areas:

- DEMOCRACY**
- ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**
- CRIME AND JUSTICE**
- ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE**
- HEALTHY BUILT ENVIRONMENT**
- EDUCATION**
- HOUSING**

## California’s History: Racial Oppression and the Multiracial Movement for Equity

California still struggles with the undigested legacy of a long and unique history of racism. Understanding that history requires, first, acknowledging the very roots of the settler colonialism upon which California was founded—the theft of Native tribes’ land and forced labor that was frequently justified with cultural and racial chauvinism. Since its creation, California’s racial history has in large measure been a push-pull of dominant, elite Whites exploiting immigrant and nonwhite labor and wealth as the engine of economic growth, while simultaneously hemming their communities in with racialized restrictions that prohibit them from obtaining the fair fruits of their labor.

**ONLY BY PUTTING RACE SQUARELY ON THE TABLE CAN WE RISE TO THE CHALLENGE THAT NOW CONFRONTS US AND HELP CALIFORNIA’S NEXT 50 YEARS BE ONES OF EQUITY AND JUSTICE.**

These systems of exploitation were built in an explicitly race-conscious way, but they persist today in new, seemingly race-neutral forms, thanks to a second major trend in our state’s race-relations history: the creation of facially color-blind systems. These systems codify and reinforce the racially unjust status quo while giving them the veneer of legality. However, California has also pioneered new, powerful approaches to fighting back against racial oppression by building multiracial organizing coalitions to challenge the inequities we have inherited.



**Photos of RACE COUNTS convenings in Oakland and Los Angeles (Photos by Katie Smith).**

## Drivers of Racial Disparity in California

Traditional approaches to understanding race and racism often center on individual acts of bias and discrimination. This approach, however, risks understating the full weight of race and racism as a determining force in California society, which motivates our focus on systemic racism.

With our partners, we have identified four key dynamics that drive and maintain race-based inequity in public systems:

1. Inequitable systems that turn race-based biases into disparities;
2. Exclusionary patterns of economic development that give or withhold prosperity based on race;
3. An imbalance of political power, including voting, representation, and voice between racial groups; and
4. Need- and color-blind policies that lock in place already existing disparities.

## Key Findings

Even a cursory look at the data confirms that despite our significant history of movement-building and progress, racial disparity remains omnipresent in California. Across the indicators we examined statewide, Black Californians were the most heavily weighed down by disparities—they have the worst rates on 18 out of 41 indicators. For example, Black children are arrested for truancy at more than three and a half times the rate for White children. Latinos also carry a heavy burden: statewide, they are never the top-ranked racial group on any indicator, and they are the single largest racial group impacted by disparities in California.

Predictably, Whites are among the highest-performing racial groups across almost all issue areas and indicators. On many indicators, Asian Americans appear to be doing well. However, data disaggregated by ethnic group consistently shows significant social and economic diversity among Asian Americans. For example, while the statewide homeownership rate for Chinese Americans (65%) exceeds that of Whites (63%), the rate of homeownership among Hmong Americans is far lower (33%), falling below that of Blacks (34%). Similarly, Native Hawaiians and Pacific

### BLACK CHILDREN ARE ARRESTED FOR TRUANCY AT MORE THAN THREE AND A HALF TIMES THE RATE FOR WHITE CHILDREN.

Islanders are clearly also a highly-impacted population, facing disparities such as the highest rate of fatalities by police.

Finally, while data limitations mean that quantitative approaches suffer from important gaps when attempting to present the lived reality of Indigenous peoples such as Native Americans and Alaska Natives, it is clear that they grapple with persistent injustice and high levels of disparity. For example, the racial makeup of elected officials is least representative for them than for any other group.

Beyond race-specific analysis, there are clear regional trends in many of the areas that we studied:

- THE BAY AREA: A RISING TIDE DOES NOT LIFT ALL BOATS.** The Bay Area is a cautionary tale to other parts of the state because its experience shows that great prosperity will not necessarily be broadly shared. For example, Marin County is not just the highest-performing county in the state—it also has the highest level of racial disparities. High-population Alameda County is the sixth-most disparate and San Francisco is the fourteenth-most disparate county. These trends are related: at the same time that the tech boom created wealth and attracted a highly-educated, high-earning workforce, it also increased housing prices and promoted gentrification, while exacerbating existing racial disparities. As a rich region, the Bay Area has the resources to do better and there is a strong tradition of advocacy and organizing for justice in the area—although the persistence of disparities indicates that these advocates must have more of a say in local decision-making.
- THE CENTRAL VALLEY: MANY NEEDS, MANY OPPORTUNITIES.** In contrast to the Bay Area, the Central Valley is the lowest-performing region in the state, although it has both higher- and lower-disparity counties. Slightly larger and more wealthy counties in the region have a higher level of disparities—such as Fresno County, which is the eighth-most disparate county in the state—with Whites having a disproportionate share of a slightly-bigger pie. Smaller and poorer counties have fewer disparities, as most residents are deprived of adequate resources. Because the injustices of the region sometimes impact members of all races in comparable ways, there are opportunities to form coalitions that include all high-need residents, though in the course of these efforts, advocates must not allow racial equity to be sacrificed.

- **LOS ANGELES COUNTY: A REGION OF ITS OWN.**

Due to its size, conditions in Los Angeles County have a significant statewide impact—the greatest number of people laboring under disparities live in Los Angeles. While the county ranks somewhat low in performance terms and is about average in terms of racial disparity, this obscures important sub-county issues and concerning findings within individual indicators. One encouraging sign is that on several education indicators, L.A. has comparatively modest levels of disparity and overall middle-of-the-road performance, impressive progress given the crisis-level challenges that have recently confronted districts in the county. In other issue areas, people of color in Los Angeles confront a much harsher landscape. L.A.'s incarceration rate is among the highest in the state, and it also has the second-highest level of disparity. Advocates in L.A. are well aware of these challenges and have won numerous campaigns to improve the lives of people of color. But given Los Angeles' size and its persistent race-based disparities, the work of advocates and organizers continues to be much-needed.

There are a small number of mid-sized counties that have generally moderate to high performance, and disparities that are smaller than the statewide averages, including Santa Clara, Orange, San Diego, and Sacramento. There are many specific indicators where these counties have low performance or high disparity levels, and countywide aggregates may also conceal higher disparities in some geographies, or for some racial subgroups. With that said, these four counties are doing comparatively better than most others. One thread that may link them is that they each have at least one nonwhite racial group that has a comparatively high economic status. It may therefore be the case that where the economic order is slightly less segregated by race, other racial disparities are also beginning to break down. Deeper study is needed to fully understand what lessons, if any, these counties have for California as a whole.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Considering the history and intersecting inequities that created our modern-day systems, and the broad and severe racial disparities these systems continue to produce, there can be no credible debate about the immediate need for transformation. The question of how to accomplish this lacks a simple answer that can be the same everywhere in the state, but with RACE COUNTS, we are presenting a framework to understand these systems and conditions in a new way and to support efforts to build capacity and cohesion around racial-justice work throughout California.

We hope that these initial findings—alongside the far more detailed data now available at RACE-COUNTS.org—can support local conversations across the state about the unique racial equity dynamics and needs at play in each region or county. It will be most important to create space for community residents most impacted by racial inequity to have a say in decision-making, as they have a deeper, first-hand experience of the harms created by these systems that goes beyond what any data project can ever understand on its own.

A few clear strategic principles already emerge from our findings: advocates in counties that are both high-performing and low-disparity should be mindful of the need to protect gains that may soon be at risk, and can use data to identify the high-need communities and issues that may be concealed by a more positive countywide picture. Meanwhile, in low-performing, low-disparity areas that are struggling to prosper, there is an urgent need to focus efforts on the highest-need areas and build new coalitions to create solidarity across all racial groups, but it will be important for coalitions to center their efforts on achieving racial equity.

Concerted action will also be needed to take on the four drivers of racial disparity that we have outlined. First, all of our public systems—especially those dedicated to criminal justice and public safety—need reforms to root out the impact of bias and stereotyping. Second, business leaders must work with advocates and policymakers to ensure that economic gains are shared more equitably. Third, California public officials must be made aware of the voices of communities of color when making decisions that impact them, through building the capacity of communities of color to engage in political participation and by creating

**RACIAL INJUSTICE HAS DEEP ROOTS IN CALIFORNIA—IT WAS BUILT INTO OUR PUBLIC SYSTEMS FROM THE BEGINNING AND HAS BEEN NURTURED AND EVOLVED OVER GENERATIONS.**

better forms of public engagement that allow impacted communities to have a say in budget and policy decisions. Fourth, Californians will need to creatively develop new policies that proactively address race-based disparities through targeted investments and new programming or interventions. Policymakers should also create and use racial-impact assessments to vet new policies for unintended consequences. Last, in the course of our analysis, we identified many data gaps and limitations that those who collect and publish data should take action to address wherever possible.

Racial injustice has deep roots in California—it was built into our public systems from the beginning and has been nurtured and evolved over generations. The effort to untangle these intersections and pull up these roots will require a commensurate level of intentionality, coordination, and sustained attention. Taken together, all of this represents a generation or more of work. This report is only the first portion of the RACE COUNTS initiative. In the months and years to come, we will extend our analysis by looking at disparities in the hundred cities in California with the largest populations of people of color. We will update the entire dataset available at RACECOUNTS.org with refreshed data as it becomes available, to better understand trends in disparity over time, and will publish issue area reports that explore the policies and practices that can reduce disparities in areas

like health care and criminal justice. Finally, we will explore the data-collection challenges and opportunities identified through this report in more detail, focusing on specific populations.

This moment is long overdue. Building power, creating solidarity, and developing effective campaigns to move the needle require time, so progress will always be slower than it needs to be. But in California, we have the tools for change—due to our inherited legacy of movement-building and solidarity, we are fortunate to have the resources, political ecology, and organizing and advocacy strength to take on the challenge of racial injustice. It's up to us now to make use of these tools and make sure the California we pass down is fairer, better, and stronger than the one we were given.

**THE EFFORT TO UNTANGLE THESE INTERSECTIONS AND PULL UP THESE ROOTS WILL REQUIRE A COMMENSURATE LEVEL OF INTENTIONALITY, COORDINATION, AND SUSTAINED ATTENTION.**

# 1. RECLAIMING THE VISION: RACIAL EQUITY IN CALIFORNIA

## Why Racial Equity? Why Now?

California has long been known as a beacon for progressive politics: a land of hope and promise—dubbed the “Golden State” 50 years ago in 1968. But for many communities of color and Indigenous people, this idealistic vision of California has never been the reality. Their experience has too often been one of exclusion and marginalization. Acknowledging these facts does not mean giving up on the possibility of a fair and inclusive California, however: our state has achieved great things because of our residents’ audacity, drive, and refusal to settle for the world as it is. The fight for racial equity is more necessary and urgent than ever, and as Californians, we have the responsibility to step up and achieve our state’s promise for all Californians.

It’s clear that today, race continues to be a major predictor of success and life chances. People of color and Indigenous people are more likely to be incarcerated, to be trapped within the confines of the underground economy, and to be suspended from school. They are less likely to earn a living wage, have access to health insurance, or live in affordable, quality housing. The mismatch between the promise of the Californian dream and the devastating realities confronting communities of color raises a contradiction between our government’s stated promise and its actually-existing systems and race-stratified results.

Our initiative—RACE COUNTS—uses race as the primary lens through which to understand these racial disparities. To be sure, race does not stand by itself: due to our history of discrimination and oppression, California’s class structure is strongly linked to race, and women and LGBTQ people

of color often face additional injustices beyond those that confront straight men of color. Putting race first in our analysis does not mean ignoring these additional intersections with economics and identity. Rather, we aim to assess what is distinct and unique about race-based injustice in California, which we hope can serve to bolster future work exploring race and class, and race and other identities.

This is not simply a question of history. Race-based injustice is a daily presence in the lives of Californians of color and Indigenous communities. As we worked on this initiative, we bore witness to a new federal administration that seems to bring racism to the forefront every day. We have seen the Department of Justice turn its back on efforts to end racist policing,<sup>1</sup> the creation of a travel ban targeted at refugees and citizens of majority-Muslim African and Middle-Eastern countries,<sup>2</sup> and a violent assault on immigrant

and undocumented families by an emboldened Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). These actions will have a specifically race-based impact.

Fortunately, across the nation and in California, community leaders are addressing racial equity head-on and pushing policymakers to answer the call of justice. We see this in the rise of a national Black Lives Matter movement, the multiracial acts of solidarity to stop the profiling of Muslims, and the quick construction of legal and rapid response networks to protect immigrants.

But while community-led organizations are advancing racial equity on the front lines, they need support from all movement-building partners. A key aim of this initiative is to change the conversation, both inside government and out, through increasing understanding of the toll systemic racism continues to take on our communities and advancing policies to eradicate it. For some time, many policymak-

ers, advocates, and funders alike have hesitated to call out race as a key factor. Our hope is that RACE COUNTS can end some of that hesitation—because only by putting race squarely on the table can we rise to the challenge that now confronts us and help California’s next 50 years be ones of equity and justice.

## Our Approach: Balancing Truth and Aspiration

The truths told by this data are not easy ones to confront. They demonstrate the barriers that confront Californians of color in every aspect of their lives, as they strive to obtain economic success, educate their children, take care of sick relatives, or resist the often-lawless power of the criminal justice system. But understanding how much is wrong is a critical step that must be taken before making things right.

California is in a unique position to advance the movement towards racial equity, with the potential for drastic shifts in power. To push forward, we need effective ways to measure and address long-standing racial disparities and to center these conversations on the residents, organizers, and advocates with direct knowledge of inequity.

Every Californian has a stake in understanding the ways our systems create racially inequitable outcomes—individual residents, opinion leaders, policymakers, and community leaders alike. Much of our engagement and partnership-building has focused on the network of organizers and advocates currently advancing the cause of racial equity across the state. We aim to create a platform to support their work to fight inequity at the local level, allowing them to use customized data to scrutinize the race-based consequences of current policy and clearly assess the equity impact of new decisions and choices moving forward. RACE COUNTS arms partners with tools to frame campaigns and advance policy recommendations that can move the needle on racial inequity in their counties and throughout California.

The RACE COUNTS initiative is built around a comprehensive, cutting-edge tool tracking three dimensions of racial equity—performance, racial disparity, and impact—across the state in seven key issue areas:

**DEMOCRACY**

**ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**

**CRIME AND JUSTICE**

**ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE**

**HEALTHY BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

**EDUCATION**

**HOUSING**

Because it is clear that simply identifying disparities is not enough, future RACE COUNTS work will focus on outreach to and engagement of organizing partners to support their use of the data, producing policy- and issue- specific reports that look more closely at particular inequitable systems to identify new approaches that can reduce disparities, and refining our data and analysis to provide an even more powerful and specific resource.

Finally, at every stage in the initiative, we have relied on partnerships with key thought leaders, community organizers, and policy advocates across issues and regions, most notably the other members of the RACE COUNTS Steering Committee: California Calls, PICO California, and the University of Southern California's Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE).

## 2. CALIFORNIA'S HISTORY: RACIAL OPPRESSION AND THE MULTIRACIAL MOVEMENT FOR EQUITY

California still struggles with the undigested legacy of our long and unique history of racial oppression. Racialized policies and practices continue to structure our society today. But we also have homegrown advocates and organizers who have pioneered new models and alliances to advance the fight for equity. While a full accounting of this history is clearly beyond the scope of this report, a brief overview of key moments can illustrate how the disparities we study came to be—and also point the way towards the strategies that can bring them to an end.

To understand that history requires, first, acknowledging the very roots of the settler colonialism upon which California was founded. Native tribes thrived in what is now known as California for at least 12,000 years prior to contact with Europeans. Upon contact, the Spanish government empowered Franciscan Catholic priests to enslave Indigenous peoples to build the California mission system under the guise of civilizing them and converting them to Christianity. While some missionaries were committed to dignifying the lives of Native people and opposed Spanish imperialist practices, nonetheless, the missions were rampant with physical, emotional, and sexual abuse and decimated entire tribal communities.<sup>3</sup> Further, the roads, fields, and missions that constituted the first Western infrastructure were often built by enslaved natives. This theft of land and labor was frequently justified with cultural and racial chauvinism.

Since its creation, California's racial history has in large measure been a push-pull of dominant, elite Whites exploiting immigrant and nonwhite labor and wealth as the engine of economic growth, while simultaneously hemming their communities in with racialized restrictions to keep them from obtaining the fair fruits of their labor.<sup>4</sup> As the Gold Rush helped make California a desirable and prosperous state in the nineteenth century, our state's economy grew through White settlers' use of land seized from Mexican *rancheros*, as well as attempts to eliminate any remaining Indigenous presence in the state—which included paying bounties for the killing of Native American children, women, and men.

The Gold Rush also relied on immigrant labor, especially that of the Chinese workers who helped build the railroad system. Characteristically, these new Americans were seen as a threat to the established order. Soon,

they saw their business and social opportunities limited by exclusionary state and local measures, including the Chinese Exclusion Act, which limited naturalization and prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers for 10 years.<sup>5</sup>

This dynamic repeated itself several times during the twentieth century. In an attempt to address White unemployment at the onset of the Great Depression, President Herbert Hoover sanctioned mass deportations of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the 1930s, which included 1.8 million people, many of whom were Californians.<sup>6</sup> Japanese Americans, whose labor likewise helped build our state's railroads, factories, and farms, were forced into internment camps during World War II, largely due to elites deploying race-based accusations of disloyalty to reap economic rewards.<sup>7</sup> In the wake of the resulting labor shortages, the government established the Bracero program, a guest worker program that employed more

than 22 million Mexican workers.<sup>8</sup> Again, the program channeled economic benefit to the largely-White owner class while denying basic rights to the workers, until grassroots activists—including Cesar Chavez—helped end it in 1964.

Similarly, although California was always a free state, the Black community here has nonetheless been exploited for its labor. For example, during World War II, Black migration from the South into the state helped keep factories open and running in the face of the war's labor shortages. Many had hoped that their new home could be a land of new opportunities—but state and local policymakers adopted discriminatory housing and labor policies that relegated them to a subordinate political, legal, and economic position.

## 2. CALIFORNIA'S HISTORY: RACIAL OPPRESSION AND THE MULTIRACIAL MOVEMENT FOR EQUITY

All told, California, much like the country at large, has used race and racism as a means to enable and justify the exploitation of nonwhite labor and the extraction of value from Indigenous communities and people of color. These systems of exploitation were built in an explicitly race-conscious way but persist today in new, seemingly race-neutral forms, thanks to a second major trend in our state's race-relations history—again and again, we have seen the creation of facially color-blind systems to codify and reinforce the racially unjust status quo, while giving them the veneer of legality.

As nonwhite Californians grew in number and power and organizers raised their voices to demand justice, the architects of White supremacy in California pioneered this new playbook of discrimination. In 1964, for example, California voters approved Proposition 14, challenging the 1963 fair housing laws and substantively legalizing racial

discrimination in housing markets.<sup>9</sup> And in the 1970s and 1980s, facing rising demands from leaders of color for equity in public spending, the forces bent on protecting a racially-unjust status quo led a wave of public divestment. One such example is 1978's Prop 13,<sup>10</sup> which starved California's schools of resources and ushered in a new era of scarcity politics that most harmed nonwhite communities.

These assaults continued through the 1980s and 1990s, as race- and immigrant-baiting politicians used discriminatory ballot measures—like 1994's Proposition 187,<sup>11</sup> denying state services to undocumented immigrants; 1996's Proposition 209,<sup>12</sup> eliminating affirmative action programs; and 1998's Proposition 227, enshrining an “English-only” approach for students learning English—as weapons to reduce the power of the rising majority of Californians and maintain their own personal wealth, power, and influence.

These years also saw our Black community especially targeted by a “tough on crime” backlash responding to what proved to be a temporary increase in crime rates, intensifying already-egregious state violence against Black Californians. California's three strikes law, Prop 184 of 1994, was perhaps the most notorious piece of this system of criminalization, over-policing, and mass incarceration.<sup>13</sup>

However, California has also pioneered new, powerful approaches to fighting back against racial oppression including building multiracial organizing coalitions and a nonprofit infrastructure to challenge the inequities we have inherited. During World War II, a Black lawyer named Hugh Macbeth worked alongside the Japanese American Citizens League to develop legal frameworks to challenge the removal of Japanese Americans.<sup>14</sup> Black and Mexican Americans worked in coalition against the racist housing provisions of Proposi-

### How We Use “White Supremacy”

“White supremacy” is a potentially loaded term, due to its frequent application to violent terrorist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. Our use of the phrase is broader and is not simply about individual belief in the racial superiority of Whites. We use the term to refer to the systems that ensure White primacy and power in all aspects of life, including politics and governance, the economy, and social control. In this understanding, the use of extrajudicial violence to punish those who challenge White dominance is one tool among many used to protect and advance White supremacy. Public systems and decisions that bar people of color from voting or exercising political power, that deny a quality education to children of color depending on their home language, or that lock up people of color for disproportionately long sentences play an important role in enforcing White supremacy. These systems function to oppress people of color regardless of the personal beliefs or intentions of actors within them.<sup>15</sup>

tion 14. A coalition of Filipino and Mexican American grape harvest workers—led by Philip Vera Cruz, Larry Itliong, Cesar Chavez, and Dolores Huerta—defined the farm labor movement when they organized the Delano grape strike from 1965 to 1970.<sup>16</sup>

These multiracial organizing partnerships and coalitions did not always agree on strategy, but they shared a common goal of challenging White supremacy in the state. And as the years passed, moments of solidarity between different groups organized around specific racial or ethnic communities began to give rise

to new, explicitly multiracial formations and organizations, such as our steering committee partners California Calls and PICO California—a distinctive-Californian innovation in the racial-equity toolbox that has seen explosive growth in the past quarter-century.

Our state's history shows us that organized power and cross-racial coalitions have led the charge to push back against regressive forces and demand much-needed improvements in our public safety, economy, health, and governance. Today, organizers and advocates have built on

these foundations, but we also face new challenges, including a hostile federal administration and too-broad public complacency about racial injustice. We are, once again, at a critical juncture between retreating from or taking up the mantle of California's future—and the lessons of the past point the way towards the work the present moment calls us all to do.

# 3. DRIVERS OF RACIAL INEQUITY IN CALIFORNIA

Traditional approaches to understanding race and racism often center on individual acts of bias and discrimination. This approach, however, risks understating the full weight of race and racism as a determining force in Californian society—which is what motivates our focus on systemic racism. These systems are historically determined, but we must acknowledge that racial disparities are not simply a legacy we have inherited. They are reinforced through deliberate action every day and there are places in California where new racially-unjust policies are being created even today.

With our partners, we have identified four key dynamics that drive and maintain race-based inequity in public systems:

1. Inequitable systems that turn race-based biases into disparities;
2. Exclusionary patterns of economic development that give or withhold prosperity based on race;
3. An imbalance of political power, including voting, representation, and voice between racial groups; and
4. Need- and color-blind policies that lock in place already existing disparities.

## Systems That Turn Bias into Disparity

Race-based stereotypes and biases are omnipresent in our society and shape the upbringing and experience of all Californians. These attitudes may express themselves via conscious and avowed discrimination, as subconscious “implicit bias,” or in other, subtler ways—but they all have a long and powerful reach.

Some of our most important public systems rely on personal discretion for their operation, which can transform these individual factors into systemic disparities. Study after study has found that nonwhite and especially Black and brown people are far more likely to be stopped by police, subjected to excessive levels of incarceration and other state violence, and even killed, compared to White people performing the same behavior in the same situations.<sup>17</sup> While there are many factors behind this

disparity, personal bias, in both conscious and implicit forms, looms large. The consequences are permanent for those who lose their lives and for families left to pick up the pieces. For those who do survive, being stamped with the label “criminal” can shut them out from access to jobs, food stamps, student loans, housing assistance, and voting rights, as well as separate them from their communities and families.<sup>18</sup>

It is not just the criminal justice system. The same dynamic plays out in other aspects of life, such as when a teacher pushes a White student to take Advanced Placement classes, while overlooking similar potential in nonwhite students due to preconceptions about what studiousness and intelligence look like.<sup>19</sup> In both cases, the systems are designed to rely on discretionary acts by individual actors—who may have

a variety of biased views—and institutionalize individual bias into differential treatment and differential investment.

Biased views can also be built into a system from the outset, and lead to disparities regardless of the personal biases of those charged with administering it. The long-existing disparity in sentencing severity for drug crimes involving crack versus powder cocaine, for example, was largely based on racist views about the distinct users of the two forms of the drug. As a result, dismantling the impacts of bias in public systems may require both changing the officials running it, as well as the rules by which it operates.

## Exclusionary Patterns of Economic Development

California's economy remains one of the most dynamic in the world, but it provides very different opportunities to those at the bottom of the economic ladder than it does to those at the top. Formerly, California's economy brought the benefits of growth broadly across economic class. Our world-leading universities and knowledge workers coexisted with large agricultural and manufacturing businesses that also relied on less-skilled and low-wage labor. Black workers with high school diplomas could get living-wage jobs with enough disposable income to purchase homes and support their families. Migrant workers who came here from other countries could earn enough to bring their families here and work their way up the economic ladder. However,

in recent decades the economy has transformed, with agriculture and manufacturing becoming concentrated in fewer areas and relying on a smaller labor force, while the size of the tech industry has drastically increased. At the same time, de-unionization efforts have reduced the influence of organized labor, robbing workers of one of their strongest advocates. As a result, where once wage growth was highest for low-income workers, this trend has reversed in recent decades.<sup>20</sup>

Due to the impact of conscious and implicit bias, generations of disinvestment, and wildly inequitable access to quality education, people of color and Indigenous people make up the majority of the working class—a class conspicuously left behind by the patterns of growth that

have been operative in California for the past several decades. We experienced the largest loss of manufacturing jobs in our history from 2000 to 2010 due to expanding information-technology advances, automation, and the finance-industry-created Great Recession.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, the fastest-growing sections of the economy, including tech, remain overwhelmingly White, partially due to a reliance on networking and other in-group-privileging social customs. This means that even highly-educated people of color and Indigenous people struggle to get a fair shot at opportunity. And many people of color working in high-skill jobs are immigrants recruited from overseas whose presence in California or eventual naturalization may depend on their employer's

goodwill, giving them limited power to demand fair wages and fair treatment.

At the same time that people of color and Indigenous people see a smaller share of the benefits of California's economic expansion, they are also paying more than their share of the price. As tech-industry wealth has inflated housing prices in the Bay Area, for example, communities of color are being priced out of their homes and even their whole neighborhoods. They are displaced into lower-cost regions where housing may be less unaffordable, but where they have fewer roots and an even smaller number of opportunities for economic mobility.

With income inequality accelerating and people of color being denied their equitable share of growth, communities of color will have a harder time obtaining the education, health care, and other resources they need to prosper.

## Imbalance in Political Power

In 2015, Latinos outnumbered Whites for the first since California became a state in 1850, and Asian Americans continue to add to California's growth as a predominately people of color state. But raw numbers do not of themselves translate into political power, and as a result of barriers to the ability of communities of color to win office or lift up an organized voice, the political power of people of color and Indigenous people does not match their share of the population.<sup>22</sup> Because the systems that create and sustain race-based disparities are primarily public systems and can be changed only through political means, these disparities are not just important in their own right—they also constitute an important driver perpetuating inequities in all other areas.

There are many reasons for these disparities. First, faced with the threat of losing control, Whites who wish to safeguard power for themselves have adopted strategies to deny communities the ability to elect candidates of their choice. These include cramming people of color and Indigenous people into as few districts as possible and adopting at-large voting systems to deny racially-distinct neighborhoods representation.<sup>23</sup> Voting rules and systems also create barriers for immigrants, Native Americans, native speakers of languages other than English,<sup>24</sup> the recently incarcerated,<sup>25</sup> low-income people, and those who move frequently. Where these barriers overlap—as for California's fast-growing African immigrant population, for example—electoral participa-

tion can be extremely challenging. As a result, registered voters, and especially likely voters, are far whiter, older, educated, and more affluent than our population as a whole. This phenomenon was dubbed the “exclusive electorate” by the Public Policy Institute of California.<sup>26</sup>

To be sure, voting is only one of many forms of political participation and Californians of color make their voices heard by directly contacting public officials, serving on public commissions, and gathering petitions or holding public meetings. However, these processes also favor those with already-high levels of political capital and resources and may be inaccessible to those with a justifiable fear or mistrust of engaging with public processes—such as the undocumented, new immigrants, and Indigenous people who have experienced a long history of governmental policies intended to destroy their culture and way of life.<sup>27</sup>

## Use of Need- and Color-Blind Policies to Perpetuate Disparities

The previous three drivers serve both to create and to perpetuate race-based disparities. By contrast, the use of need-blind or color-blind policies in our public systems generally does not create new disparities, but plays a powerful role in “freezing in” the discriminatory effects of historical disinvestment and racial animus. Legal and social restrictions prevent those who benefit from inequity from using directly race-conscious systems to maintain their privilege. But by creating policies that ignore race, history, and need, they have managed to obscure the way many facially-neutral systems contribute to the ongoing subordination of people of color and Indigenous people.

Because so many of our systems are need-blind, and were created when racial injustice was more broadly tolerated, these policies are ubiquitous, especially in the area of fiscal policy, which has long been weaponized in California. In the 1970s, people of color became a larger share of the population and began winning victories for equity, such as the *Serrano v. Priest* litigation,<sup>28</sup> which required equality in school funding. The immediate response was the passage of 1978’s Proposition 13, which sharply cut property taxes and made it significantly harder to raise revenues for public investment.<sup>29</sup> The painful results were California’s fall in 2010 to 43rd in the nation in per-pupil spending<sup>30</sup> and a politics of scarcity that pits communities and needs against each other.

Beyond disinvestment, color-blind rules governing college admission and prohibiting affirmative action have pushed Black and Latino Californians out of higher education, and many local funding decisions are made without regard to need, for example, adopting simple rule-of-five approaches that give equal resources to each of a County’s supervisorial districts. Similarly, local planning and zoning decisions that use ahistorical, race-neutral criteria to decide things like where to place new industrial facilities can end up targeting communities of color and Indigenous peoples,<sup>31</sup> because they fail to acknowledge the ways racist systems put people of color into low-property-value, unhealthy places and then kept them there.

While legal prohibitions do mean that in some cases, race cannot be directly considered by public systems, data-driven needs-assessments can help capture the consequences of our history of discrimination. Lo-

cal governments can also adopt intentional community engagement approaches to bring the people most impacted by injustice into the decision-making process and allow their voices to reveal what their community needs.

These four drivers are powerfully active in today’s California and they ensure that racial disparities are maintained and even strengthened by our public systems. They do not operate in isolation, but instead are interconnected. Political voice correlates with economic clout, for example, so an exclusionary economy likewise weakens the capacity of people of color to participate in politics and exert influence, while a political system that’s already hostile to their interests will frustrate attempts to create more economic opportunity. This is one of the many ways in which race and class are intertwined in California. Simi-

larly, color-blind systems that do not track results based on race make it harder to create accountability for decisions grounded in bias. Therefore, our analysis looks at racial disparities not on their own, but as the result of multiple complex systems, which call for solutions that will likewise be complex and work across issue areas.

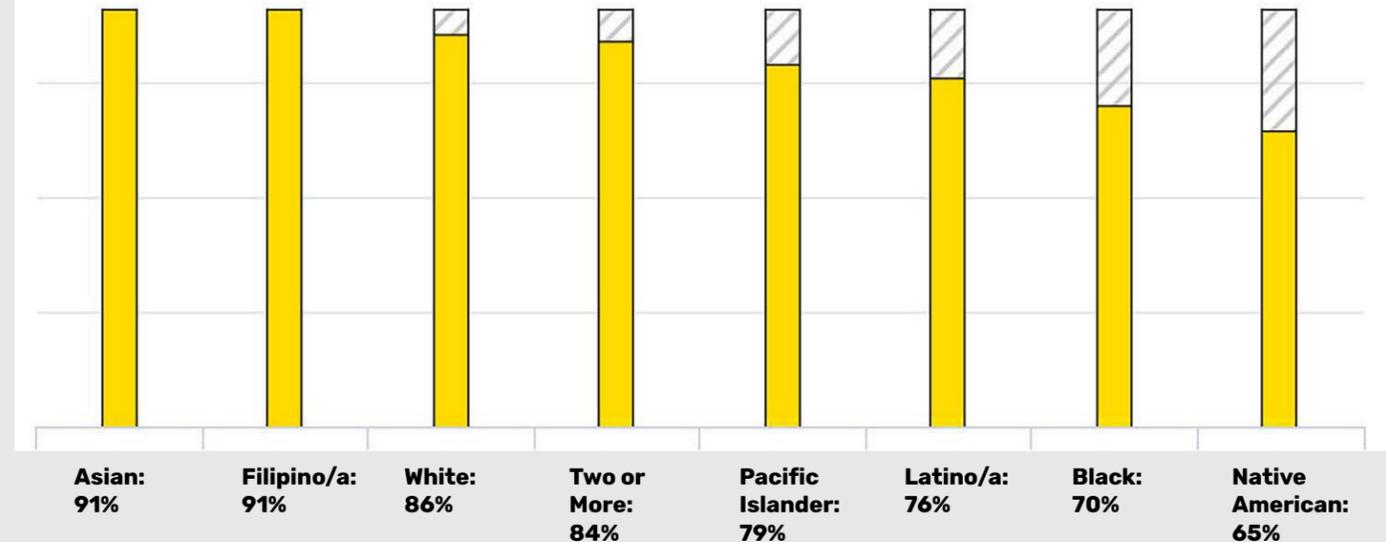
# 4. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY<sup>32</sup>

RACE COUNTS presents a three-dimensional analysis of racial equity by looking at performance, racial disparity, and impact and by assessing California counties across seven key issue areas: democracy, economic opportunity, crime and justice, access to health care, healthy built environment, education, and housing. We selected a total of 44 indicators spanning the seven issue areas after reviewing the literature and meeting with organizers and advocates with on-the-ground experience.

Measuring performance and impact are straightforward. Performance is how well or poorly a county's total population is doing on a particular indicator, issue area, or overall. For example, when we compare performance in high school graduation rates between Los Angeles and Orange counties, we are comparing their overall graduation rates. Impact is the size of the total population. Following this example, Los Angeles has a population of nearly 10 million people, more than three times the size of Orange, with a population of nearly 3.1 million people. All else being equal, the expected impacts of disparities are larger in Los Angeles than Orange County, based on population size.

Racial disparity is more complicated. We measure racial disparity for two primary reasons: to compare racial groups directly to one another (e.g., life expectancy of Blacks versus Whites) and to summarize the overall level of disparity for all races for comparison across counties (e.g., disparity in high school graduation rates between Los Angeles and Orange counties).

## LOS ANGELES COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES



## Comparing Racial Groups

Racial groups are directly compared with a straightforward rate difference. To compare high school graduation rates of Blacks and Whites in a county, for example, we simply subtract the Black high school graduation rate from the White high school graduation rate, with a result of 0 implying total equity. In the Figure, in Los An-

geles County the graduation-rate difference between Blacks (70%) and Whites (86%) is 16%.

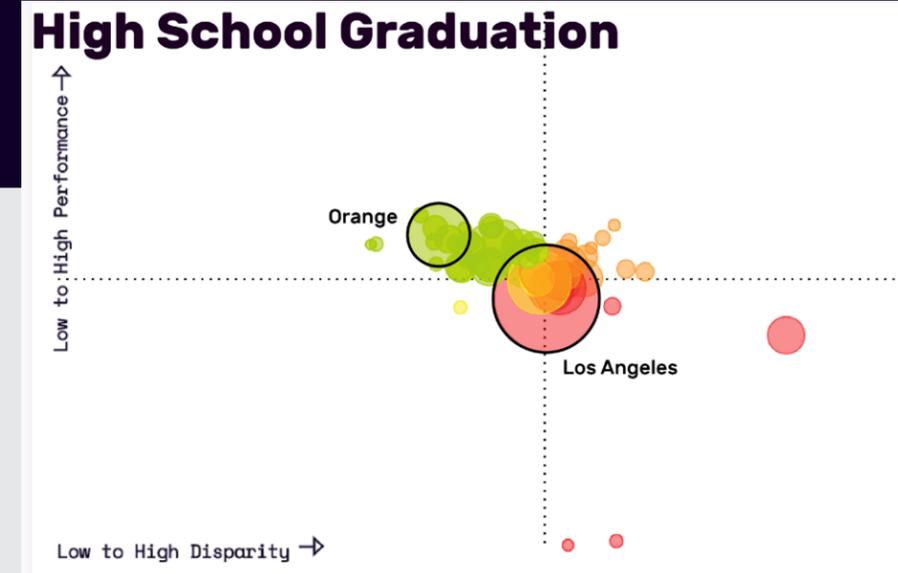
We use rate differences because they “implicitly endors[e] the position that inequality matters but it is not all that matters.”<sup>33</sup> Other potential metrics focus solely on equity—for instance when outcomes

are improving from an absolute standpoint for all groups, dividing one group's rate over another's (i.e., a rate ratio) can show that inequity is increasing if the difference between groups is growing despite overall better conditions. In contrast, rate differences reflect both inequity and progress toward positive outcomes.

## Summary Scores of Racial Disparity

To summarize overall equity in outcomes we use a metric called the Index of Disparity (ID), which averages the absolute rate differences between group rates and a reference rate and expresses it as a percentage of the reference rate.<sup>34</sup> We use the best rate as the reference rate for IDs to prioritize both equity and progress. In rare cases where the “best” rate cannot be used because of data limitations, we have substituted the total population rate or the best non-zero rate. For example, the Los Angeles County high school graduation ID is 13.8%, meaning that the average difference in high school graduation rates of each race from the best racial rate—the Asian graduation rate of 91.3%—is 13.8%. This is more than double Orange County’s high school graduation ID of 5.9%, indicating a significantly higher level of racial disparity.

The ID is sensitive to how we characterize the data (e.g., measuring insurance rates as against measuring uninsurance rates, or employment rates as against unemployment rates). We made these decisions by assessing the best way to represent a given outcome or experience, based on how it is typically used in the literature, what we think is helpful for this initiative, and how the indicator is understood and used publicly.



Scatterplot of performance, disparity, and impact for high school graduation rates. The size of each circle denotes a county’s size, and its color indicates the performance-disparity quadrant into which it falls.

## Rankings

To rank all 58 counties by performance and racial disparity, we calculated z-scores for county total performance values and IDs. These z-scores also are averaged across indicators to provide an aggregate score for each county by issue area and for all 44 indicators overall. (See the Figure for the composite scatterplot of these z-scores for high school graduation rates.)

The results are visualized on scatterplots with disparity measured on the x-axis (relatively higher disparity to the right, relatively lower disparity to the left) and

performance on the y-axis (relatively higher performance to the top, relatively lower performance to the bottom), with the size of their circles—which depends on their total population—representing impact. This is what we call the three dimensions of racial equity.

We have used color coding to display the relationship between performance and disparity for each county. Counties colored green are those with “Gains at Risk”; they have above average performance and below average disparity metrics—indicating progress in some areas that

may be under threat by changing economic or demographic trends. Counties colored orange are those with “Prosperity for the Few,” as they have overall high performance but relatively higher race-based disparities. Yellow counties are “Struggling to Prosper,” as they have relatively lower disparities often due to lower performance, indicating deprivation affecting all county residents. Finally, red counties are “Stuck and Unequal,” with low performance and high disparities both representing barriers to progress.

## Limitations and Data Shortfalls

Race and disparity are clearly complex subjects. As a result, our analysis inevitably has some limitations that should be kept in mind. First, race is intersectional and our work focuses on the racial experience, meaning that intersectional experiences related to class, immigrant status, and other population characteristics are largely absent from the performance, racial disparity, and impact calculations. We also are largely unable to go beyond race to disaggregate by specific ethnicities or national origins, which for some racial groups—such as Asian Americans and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders—may mask a high degree of variation. Second, in this report

we use data at the state and county levels. As we will discuss in more detail in the following section, this may obscure important trends at sub-county levels.

Finally, while RACE COUNTS is the most comprehensive compilation of data about racial equity by county in California, weaknesses in the available data are evident. Data availability in the democracy issue area was particularly challenging for less-populous counties and we rely on surname data to characterize race in three indicators. The availability of data by race at sub-state levels was challenging across the board, and we needed to create weighted averages to address this issue in some cases. There are also

some communities that have low population counts in many counties—such as Native Americans and Alaska Natives—which is often due to a lack of data collection in their communities, a lack of participation in official data collection due to distrust arising from historic oppression, or small population sizes, meaning that on some indicators, the data for these communities may be unreliable. Reliable data on the state’s significant undocumented population is also extremely limited. In the “Conclusions and Recommendations” section of this report, we offer suggestions for those who gather and analyze data that would address these issues.

**IN EVERY CORNER OF THE STATE, IN EVERY ASPECT OF LIFE, PEOPLE OF COLOR AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES STILL FACE THE CHALLENGE OF RACE-BASED DISPARITIES.**

# 5. KEY FINDINGS

Even a cursory look at the data confirms that despite our significant history of movement-building and progress, racial disparity remains omnipresent in California. The evidence is that in every corner of the state, in every aspect of life, people of color and Indigenous peoples still face the challenge of race-based disparities. Our research shows that injustice plays itself out differently in each of our regions and different racial communities experience higher barriers in some issue areas relative to others. The array of race-based disparities currently at play in California is almost overwhelming. Consider just a few representative findings:

- Within Fresno County’s public schools only 28% of Latino third graders were rated proficient in math, which is less than half the rate of their White peers.
- In San Francisco, the incarceration rate for Blacks is more than 28 times higher than that of Whites.
- Asian Americans in San Diego County have a voter registration rate of only 45%—far lower than the countywide average of 76%.

However, these kinds of pairwise racial comparisons, shocking as they are, do not do justice to the full reach and scale of race-based inequity in California. All the aspects of daily life intersect, from housing to education to economic opportunity. The accumulated weight of disparity can bear down against the well-being of communities of color. Through our analysis, we have attempted to come to grips with this burden by looking at trends in disparity by race at the state level, by region, by issue area, and also by county type.

## Statewide Findings in Disparity by Race

California’s history, as described above, has frequently seen White supremacist policies and practices targeted at specific racial groups as well as at people of color generally. As a result of this history, our analysis unsurprisingly finds that some racial groups are systematically more likely to be harmed by race-based disparities, while others are more frequently found to be higher-performing.

Across the indicators we examined statewide, Black Californians were most heavily weighed down by disparities. They are the lowest-performing group on 18 out of the 41 indicators for which they are included in the data—higher than any other group. For example, Black children are arrested for truancy at more than three and a half times the rate for White children. They also have the worst rates in California for life expectancy, homeownership, suspensions, household income, census participation, and incarceration. Across every issue area, Black Californians face multiple interlocking disparities that accumulate into the greatest burden of any racial group in the state.

### Going Deeper

This report presents only an initial set of findings based on the data we have collected. While this overview demonstrates the broad range of racial disparities that affect people of color and Indigenous peoples across California, in many cases a richer analysis will be required to fully understand the specific challenges and opportunities in particular counties. At RACECOUNTS.org, advocates, organizers, and researchers can dive deeper into 44 indicators across all seven issue areas, with race-specific data available at the indicator and county level. Future RACE COUNTS publications will also take a closer look at particular issue areas, key populations, and policy priorities.

Latinos also carry a heavy burden: they have the lowest rates on 7 out of 41 indicators, including having a usual source of health care, housing quality, drinking-water contamination, and managerial occupations. Statewide, they are never the top-performing racial group on any indicator. The Latino population is the single largest racial group impacted by disparities in California, meaning 14.5 million Californians are impacted by these disparities. On indicators where Latinos have among the worst rates, such as health insurance, the numbers can be breathtaking: statewide 2.3 million more Latinos would have the basic protection of health coverage if they were insured at the same rates as Whites. Small differences in rates can mask significant differences in scale. For example, Latinos have slightly higher homeownership rates than Blacks, but if both groups did as well as Whites on this indicator, over 230,000 more Blacks Californians would own

homes, while the increase would be nearly 730,000 for Latinos.

Predictably, Whites are among the highest-performing racial groups across almost all issue areas and indicators. On many indicators, Asian Americans also appear to be doing well. However, data disaggregated by ethnic group consistently shows significant social and economic diversity among Asian Americans. Data on homeownership and health insurance coverage illustrates this diversity: while the statewide homeownership rate for Chinese Americans (65%) exceeds that of Whites (63%), the rate of homeownership among Hmong Americans is far lower (33%), falling below that of Blacks (34%). Similarly, while the percentage of Japanese Americans in California who are uninsured (7%) is lower than the percentage for Whites (8%), the share of Korean Americans without health insurance (20%) exceeds that of Blacks (12%) and approaches that of Latinos (23%). Further analysis of

disaggregated data is needed to understand the ways that disparities impact Asian-American communities.

Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders are clearly also a highly-impacted population, although the story told by the data is sometimes made cloudy by a number of factors: they have comparatively small numbers in California and tend to be more geographically concentrated, and on some indicators, they are categorized together with Asian racial groups whose relatively higher performance, as discussed above, may mask the reality experienced by this distinct set of communities. Still, even on statewide measures, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders face significant disparities: they have a higher suspension rate than Latinos, for example, and have the single highest rate of fatalities by police.

As discussed earlier, data limitations mean that quantitative approaches suffer from important

## Cities and Counties

Evaluating disparities and performance at the county level has a number of important advantages for understanding racial inequities in California. First, it puts the focus on county supervisors and officials who have significant power to impact residents' lives across issue areas—counties play an important role in providing health care and social services, overseeing local education agencies, and prosecuting and locking people up through the criminal justice system. This approach also allows for the grouping of counties into regions to understand dynamics that are playing out across a broad area of the state.

However, the county-level picture does have limitations. Different parts of a county may

have radically different economic, social, or political realities, which are lost when zooming out to a countywide perspective, including systematic differences between cities and unincorporated areas. Cities have their own areas of responsibility and accountable decision-makers, and the priorities of advocates working with mayors and city councilmembers may not exactly match the priorities of those working countywide. As a result, in the future we will expand the RACE COUNTS initiative by incorporating city-level data for the California cities that are home to large numbers of people of color. Where zip-code and census-tract-level data is available, we will also offer it through our visualization and mapping platform [HealthyCity.org](https://www.healthy-city.org).

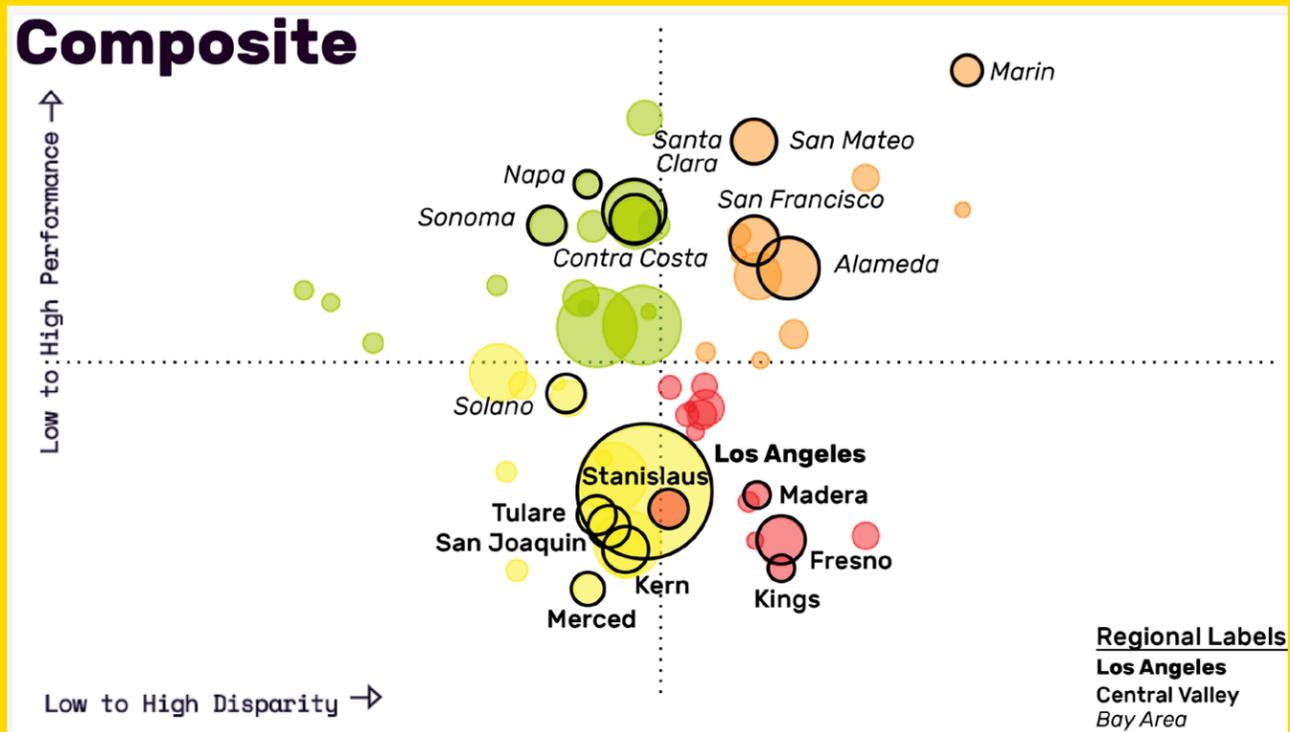
gaps when attempting to present the lived reality of Indigenous peoples such as Native Americans and Alaska Natives. Much like Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, they are often geographically concentrated and have comparatively smaller populations.

Nonetheless, it is clear that they grapple with persistent injustice and high levels of disparity. For

example, the racial makeup of elected officials is least representative for them than for any other group. As a population that is more rural-based than most others in California, they also perform worse on indicators such as internet access, where they are the lowest-performing statewide. There are also substantial urban Indigenous populations who face their own challenges—such as

in Los Angeles County, where they lag all other groups in high school graduation and low birth-weight rates. When considering the disparities faced by Indigenous peoples, it is critical to look at local data as much as possible and consider the specific context and circumstances.

## Composite

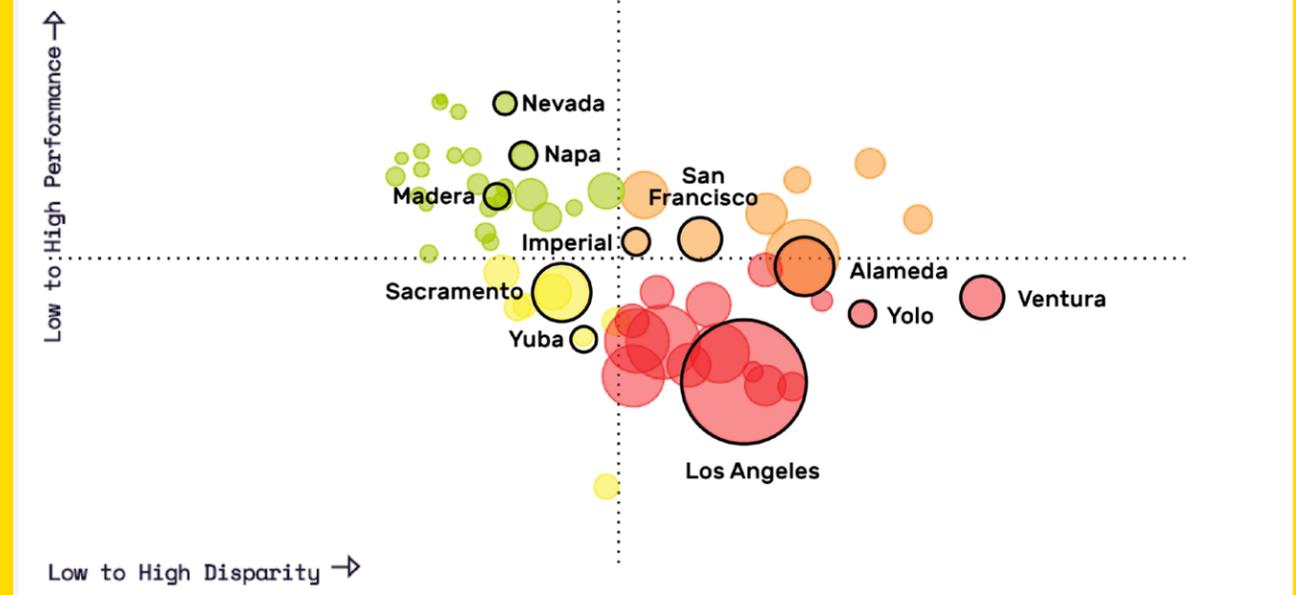


Scatterplot of the composite index incorporating all 44 indicators, with counties labeled according to their region.

## FINDINGS IN DISPARITY BY REGION

Each county in California is unique and has its own landscape of disparities, inequities, and signs of progress. However, there are clear regional trends in many of the areas that we studied, indicating that advocates in these places may be able to learn from each other, create a common agenda, and take coordinated action focused on the challenges particular to their counties.

## Crime and Justice Issue Area



Scatterplot of Crime and Justice composite index, which incorporates all indicators within the issue area. Most higher-population counties are also lower-performing and higher-disparity.

## FINDINGS IN DISPARITY BY ISSUE

Although we found substantial disparities in each issue area that we examined, they are not all equal. We calculated statewide issue-level Indices of Disparity (ID) by averaging together the Indices for all the indicators within each issue area. Through this approach, we can determine the domains where racial inequity is sharpest—as well as where California has so far made the farthest progress towards justice—acknowledging that progress is needed in every one of the seven areas.

### CRIME AND JUSTICE (MOST DISPARATE ISSUE)

The greatest race-based disparities in California are in the realm of criminal justice, a reflection of the fact that the justice system is built on the kind of discretionary decision-making—picking who to stop, who to arrest, who to charge, and what sentence to hand down—that, without safeguards, can turn individual bias into

systemic racial injustice. These disparities are largely driven by the incarceration indicator, which is in turn the single most racially-disparate indicator we studied.

Notably, almost all medium-sized or larger counties are both low-performing and highly-disparate, compared with a tight cluster of high-performing, low-disparity small counties. This suggests that disparities in criminal justice are not a regional problem—they appear to persist everywhere in California that is large enough to have a substantial system. Encouragingly, advocates' strategies have been well-aligned with this reality, as they have pushed to win state-level reforms while watchdogging county-level implementation, including the Proposition 47 sentencing-reform campaign and current efforts to reform bail practices and limit jail expansion.

**FINDINGS IN DISPARITY BY ISSUE**

**EDUCATION (SECOND MOST DISPARATE ISSUE)**

Education is often seen as a key equalizer, providing opportunities for talented children and youth of all races to make the most of their talents. It's therefore deeply concerning that the second-greatest area of disparity is the realm of education. Many small and mid-sized counties, especially in the Central Valley, struggle with low performance and high disparity, reflecting the challenges these often under-resourced districts confront, including the difficulty of recruiting a sufficient number of qualified teachers and staff.

Particular indicators show more specific trends. Other than Orange County, most mid-sized and larger counties have high levels of disparity in third-grade math achievement. School discipline and suspensions see the highest levels of disparity within this issue area, often driven by excessively high suspension rates for Black, Latino, and Native American students. Making progress on these disparities

will require progress on efforts to improve school discipline via implementing restorative justice practices, making schools safe and welcoming for all students, providing school districts with adequate funding, and adopting equity-based funding approaches that direct extra support to the school sites with the greatest numbers of high-need students.

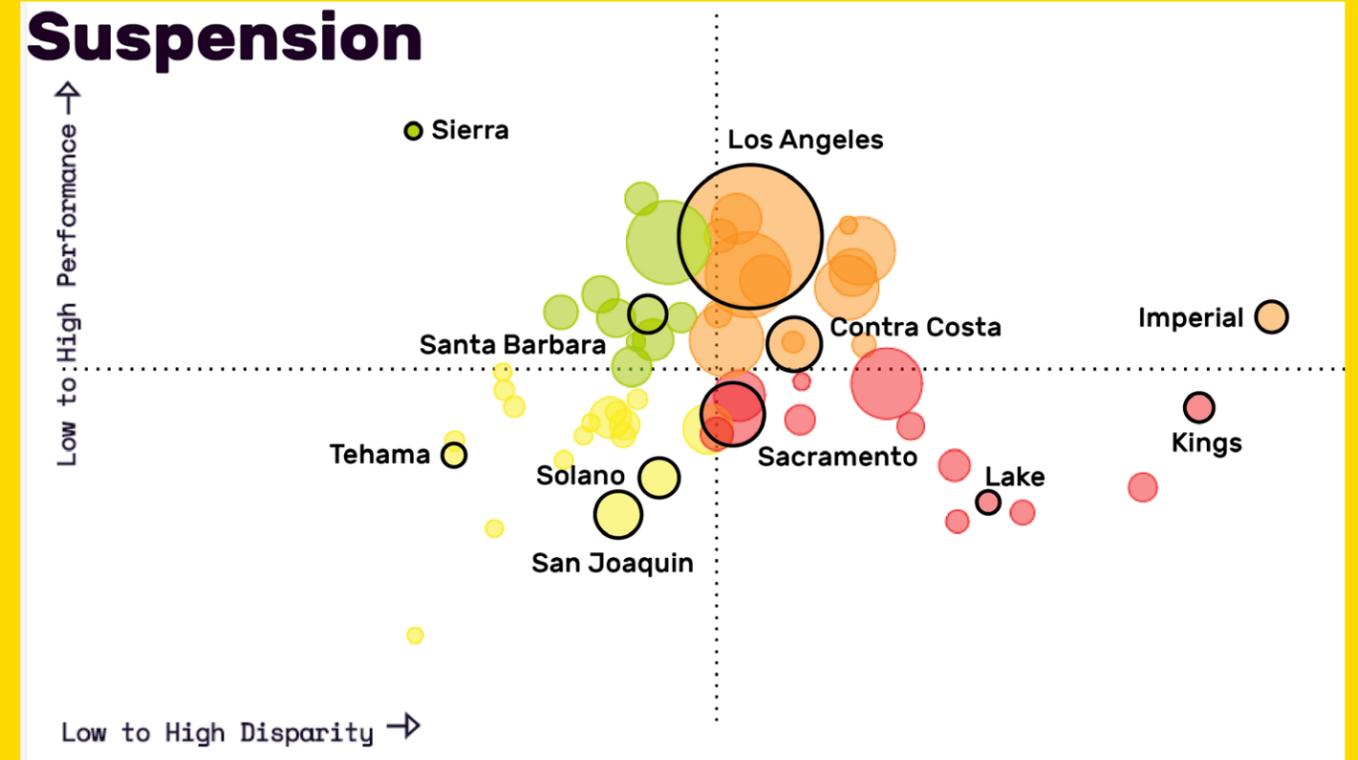
**ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE (THIRD MOST DISPARATE ISSUE)**

There is some good news when assessing disparities in health care access—there are a few mid-sized counties, including Orange County and San Diego, that are comparatively high-performing and have relatively-lower health disparities (although this may partially reflect that undocumented residents are not being counted in official data). However, there are also many high-performing counties that nonetheless have high levels of disparity, such as San Francisco and Marin County. It's also concerning that many populous counties in Southern California, like Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino, have average levels

of disparity and very low levels of performance.

Some of these trends may be related to uninsurance rates, as those immigrant-rich Southern California counties generally have lower levels of coverage, which may reflect the challenges that immigrants—both those with and without documentation—often face in obtaining insurance, even after the implementation of the Affordable Care Act. Current work to build on the successes of health care reform by expanding coverage to all county residents can help address these gaps. But coverage is not enough: even many counties with lower uninsurance rates have high levels of race-based disparity in some key indicators, like low birth-weight and preventable hospitalization, meaning a comprehensive approach to health access is required.

As one of the first components of RACE COUNTS following up on the initiative's launch, we will soon be releasing a report focusing on how counties' safety nets can be used to address disparities in access to health care.



**Scatterplot of the suspension rate indicator, which is the most disparate indicator within the Education issue area.**

## THE BAY AREA: A RISING TIDE DOES NOT LIFT ALL BOATS

The Bay Area is a cautionary tale to other parts of the state because its experience shows that a rising tide does not by itself lift all boats and that great prosperity will not necessarily be broadly shared. New systems for equity will be needed to remedy on-going injustices and ensure that growth is shared fairly.

The Bay Area has long been a prosperous region. For decades, it has been in the throes of a tech boom the likes of which the world has never seen, led by Silicon Valley start-ups, venture capital firms, and companies like Apple, Facebook, and Lyft. Likely because of the tremendous wealth in the region, the Bay Area is the highest-performing area across all the issue areas that we studied. When we rank the counties strictly on performance using the composite index incorporating all 44 indicators, eight

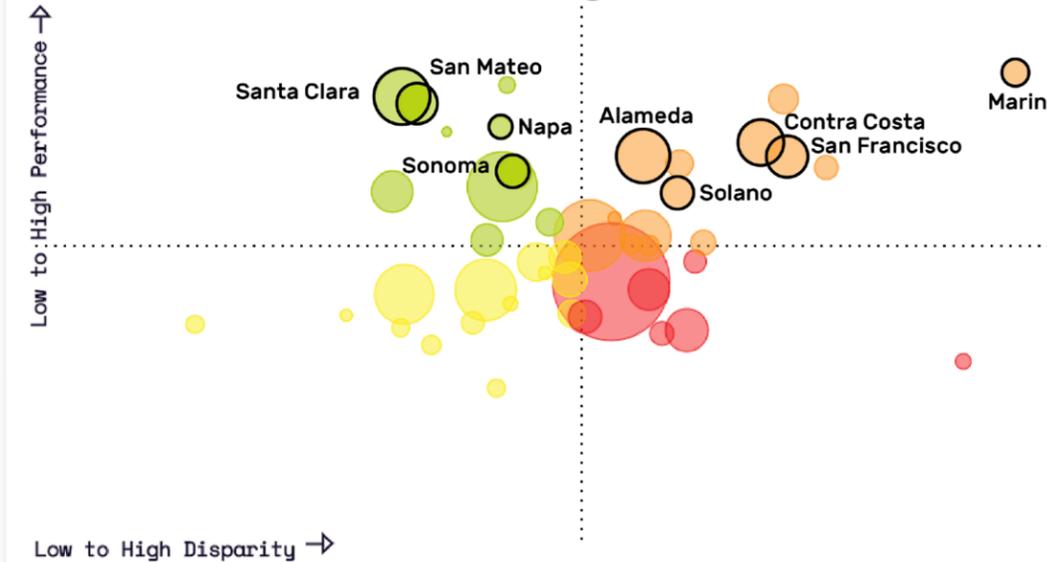
of the nine Bay Area counties are all included in the top 17 highest-performing counties, with Marin ranked number one in the state (only Solano falls outside of this top group, at 36).

This rising tide, however, is leaving people of color behind. Marin County is not just the highest-performing county in the state—it also has the highest level of racial disparities. High-population Alameda County is the sixth-most disparate and San Francisco ranks fourteenth. These trends are related. At the same time that the tech boom created wealth and attracted a highly-educated, high-earning workforce, it also increased housing prices and promoted gentrification, while exacerbating existing racial disparities.<sup>35</sup> In general, Whites and Asian Americans (at least in aggregates that may mask disparities) prosper

in the Bay Area, while Black and Latino residents are frequently denied their fair share.

The economic opportunity issue area shows how these dynamics play out. Bay Area counties are high-performing when it comes to income once housing is paid for, for example, showing that many owners and renters are able to afford housing even with inflated Bay Area housing prices. But high racial disparities and a high cost of living mean that people of color are hard-pressed to keep up, leading to many of them being forced out of San Francisco and Alameda by rising rents and forced to attempt to find more affordable homes in outlying counties. Many Bay Area counties are also high-performing and high-disparity on median household income and on the racial composition of companies' officials and manager-level

## Income After Housing Costs (Renter)



Scatterplot of the renters' income after paying for housing indicator, with Bay Area counties highlighted. All the region's counties are higher-performing, but there are high disparities in many.

## Santa Clara County: At the Frontier of Racial Equity

Santa Clara County is noteworthy because unlike most of the other Bay Area counties, it combines very high performance with levels of racial disparity that are slightly better than those for the state as a whole. It is also notable because it is the heart of Silicon Valley, home to tech-industry cities like San Jose, Mountain View, and Cupertino.

As discussed in more detail in the “Trends by County Type” section of this report, there are reasons to be interested in the “Gains at Risk” high-performance, low-disparity counties and also reasons to be cautious about looking to them as models. Santa Clara bears this out: while the general pattern holds true for democracy, economic opportunity, and healthy built environment indicators, the county has comparatively higher levels of racial disparity when it comes to crime and justice and edu-

cation. City-level data is needed to assess how people of color are faring in the areas with the greatest economic growth, which may be lost in the countywide picture. It's also the case that counties can end up in this quadrant due to having two or more relatively higher-performing racial groups. In Santa Clara, the groups are Whites and Asian Americans, which may not reflect how higher-need racial groups are doing.

It's also the case that the cost of living, and especially of housing, is skyrocketing in the county, meaning that Santa Clara's communities of color are at high risk of displacement and racial equity gains are at risk.<sup>36</sup> In many ways, it is a county on the frontier of racial equity, with some reasons to be proud, persistent and powerful areas of racial injustice, and new challenges on the horizon.

employees. People of color face a painful dilemma when it comes to economic opportunity—the best jobs are passing them by, and the high cost of living is forcing them out even as they try to take advantage of what opportunities they can access.

In contrast to the general trend of high performance, many Bay Area counties are low-performing on criminal justice indicators, including Santa Clara and Monterey. Once again, however, there is high disparity across the region. For example, of the five highest-disparity counties for truancy arrests, three are in the Bay Area. San Mateo and San Francisco are in the top four highest-disparity counties for fatal shootings by police. While San Francisco, Alameda, and Santa Clara have lower incarceration rates than most of the state, they are nonetheless among the highest when it comes to disparity.

As a rich region, the Bay Area has the resources to do better. Fortunately, there is a strong tradition

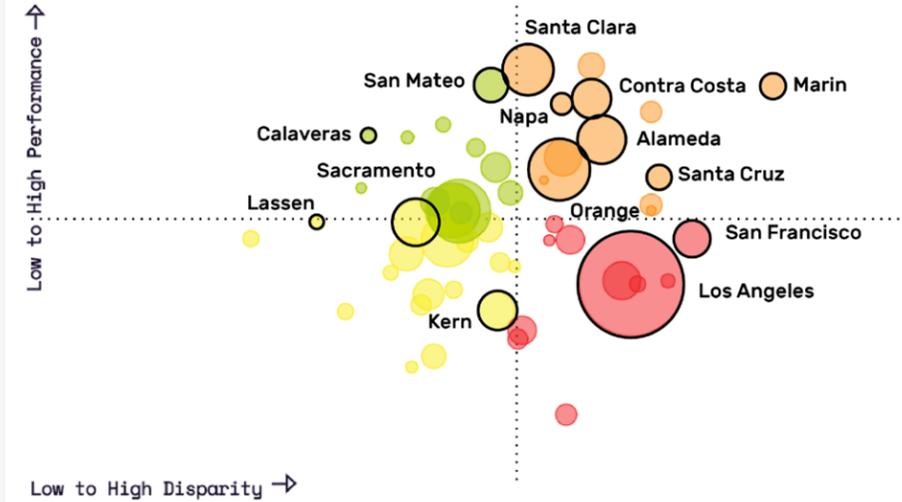
of advocacy and organizing for justice in the area—although the persistence of disparities indicates that these advocates must have more of a say in local decision-making. Housing affordability advocates have won tenants-rights measures to limit rent increases and evictions in Alameda County and continue to push region-wide. Organizers have also taken aim at the criminal justice system, working to bring more transparency and better community accountability to law enforcement actions and leadership—including district attorneys. And they have worked to reorient the incarceration-first status quo toward one that invests in prevention, treatment, and services, by leading the local implementation of statewide policy like the sentencing reforms in Propositions 47 and 57.

## FINDINGS IN DISPARITY BY ISSUE

### HEALTHY BUILT ENVIRONMENT (FOURTH MOST DISPARATE ISSUE)

Because much of our state remains segregated by race within counties, there are significant race-based disparities when it comes to Californians’ built environment: whether communities have access to clean drinking water and sufficient food, can easily access a neighborhood park for exercise and recreation, or are close to toxic facilities or other hazards. Most of California’s coastal counties from the Central Coast north are high-performing, unsurprisingly, but even though many of them have ample environmental resources, they are also among the highest-disparity. For example, Alameda County has the third-highest performance level when it comes to park access, but is also the second-highest disparity county in the state on this measure.

## Housing Issue Area



Scatterplot of Housing composite index, which incorporates all indicators within the issue area. Many medium-sized and smaller counties are relatively less disparate, though all counties face housing challenges.

The built environments in southern and inland counties are lower-performing, and many of them have high disparities to boot, including Los Angeles, Fresno, and Orange counties. While changing the built environment can be a slow process, organizers and advocates are taking advantage of new environmental policies, like funding from California’s cap-and-trade global warming auction program, to ensure that resources for environmental improvements are directed to the highest-need communities.

### HOUSING (FIFTH MOST DISPARATE ISSUE)

Housing is a relatively low-disparity issue area, because the state as a whole struggles with affordability, although gentri-

fication hits communities of color the hardest. The counties that have the highest disparities tend to be the most urbanized ones, unsurprisingly, such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Orange counties, while in general, small, rural counties are both higher-performing and lower-disparity. Some medium-sized counties, like Riverside, San Diego, and San Bernardino, are medium performers with comparatively lower disparity, underlying the significant role played by high housing prices in denser areas. Outside of San Francisco, much of the Bay Area is high-performing but also high-disparity for housing issues, painting a picture of late-stage displacement—costs are high but high-income racial groups are

able to afford them, even as skyrocketing rents exact a toll on communities of color.

Beyond affordability, housing quality may also be a barrier in many parts of the state. Los Angeles has low performance on this indicator and very high levels of race-based disparity, with Latinos more than twice as likely as Whites to live in housing that lacks kitchen facilities, plumbing, and heat. To ameliorate all of these problems, organizers are working to win tenant protections and promote the creation of new housing that is truly affordable for people of color, including statewide campaigns to enshrine protections for tenants and limit speculation in residential property.

## THE CENTRAL VALLEY: MANY NEEDS, MANY OPPORTUNITIES

In contrast to the Bay Area, the Central Valley is the lowest-performing region in the state. While the agriculture industry that dominates much of the region remains strong, severe drought, labor shortages, and political uncertainty have affected the Central Valley in recent years, and new investment dollars and industries have often been slow to come to these counties. All eight Central Valley counties are ranked in the 13 lowest-performing counties, with Merced ranked last in the state.

The Central Valley counties are spread across a wider spectrum when it comes to disparity, in contrast to their consistently low performance. Whiter, wealthier owner classes have retained advantages in education, professional employment, and homeownership, while poorer, often immigrant, people of color, and

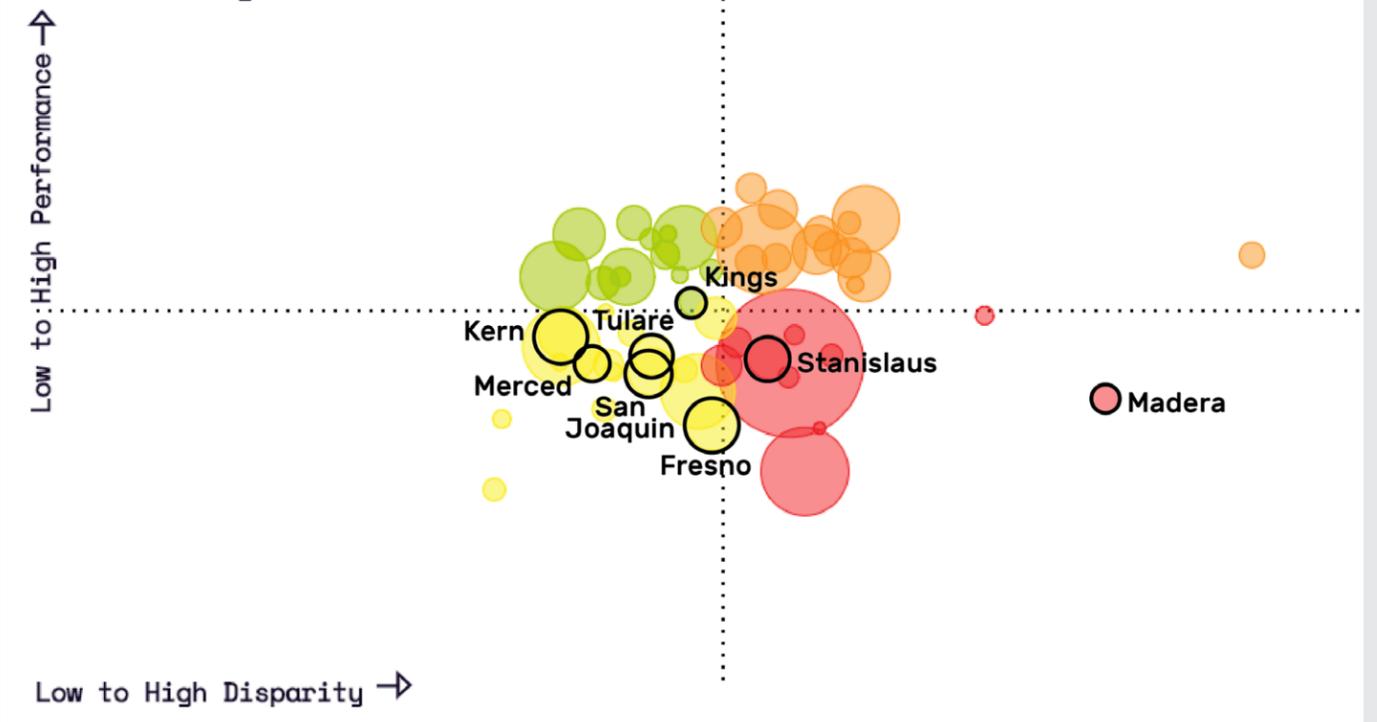
Indigenous people have struggled by comparison. Notably, local Asian Americans frequently come from subgroups that have experienced a higher level of discrimination and are often lower-performing than Asian-American populations elsewhere in the state. With that said, in many counties the presence of large numbers of low-income Whites reduces the size of race-based disparities—though of course this is not a model for reducing racial disparities that is to anyone’s benefit.

As a result, slightly larger and more wealthy counties in the region have a higher level of disparities—such as Fresno County, which is the eighth-most disparate county in the state—with Whites having a disproportionate share of a slightly-bigger pie. Smaller and poorer counties have fewer disparities, as most

residents are deprived of adequate resources. This dynamic is visible at the indicator level: when it comes to homeownership, Central Valley counties have lower levels compared to the state as a whole, but there are high disparities in Fresno County and lower ones in Madera and Merced. Similarly, many healthy built environment indicators fit this mold, reflecting the large number of hazards and contaminants in the industry-heavy Central Valley and segregated housing patterns that often disproportionately expose people of color to the risks.

Crime and justice indicators are a notable exception to this trend: most Central Valley counties are both very low-performing and very high-disparity, indicating that the justice system is especially brutal for the people of color who live there. In Kern County,

## Healthy Built Environment Issue Area



**Scatterplot of Healthy Built Environment composite index, which incorporates all indicators within the issue area. Central Valley counties are highlighted; most are lower-performing, with a broad range of disparities.**

for example, law enforcement agencies are particularly unrepresentatively White: the White rate of law enforcement employment in Kern is roughly in line with the state average for Whites, while the Latino rate is roughly two thirds of their state average, and the Black rate less than one third their state number. This is likely one reason why when it comes to communities' perception of safety, Kern is both low-performing and the fourth most-disparate county in the state.

Finally, on democracy indicators, the Central Valley is also sometimes low-performing and high-disparity—for example on turnout in midterm elections. There is less disparity on other democracy indicators such as how racially representative Central Valley elected officials are of their communities. This is partially the result of powerful organizing and electoral efforts patterned on strategies that have been successful in other regions of the state. Advocates continue to do the

work to create deeper democratic engagement by people of color, which is much needed.

As with other regions, there is a high need for racial equity advocacy in the Central Valley—indeed, across the performance-disparity charts we created for the seven issue areas, in only two cases did a Central Valley county wind up in the higher-performance, lower-disparity “Gains at Risk” quadrant, indicating the scale of the challenge. There are also global trends that risk making things even harder for people of color in the region. The agricultural industry continues to shift towards smaller workforces, and people displaced from higher cost-of-living places are coming to the area and making portions of the Central Valley more difficult to afford in turn.

Advocates and organizers have risen to these challenges, marshalling support for campaigns to expand park access and improve land use rules to protect communities of color from environmen-

tal hazards. They have also seen successes such as the adoption of new apartment inspection rules in Fresno to improve the quality of rental housing. And they are taking on an often-unaccountable criminal justice system, pushing for more transparency and more representative law enforcement personnel. Because the injustices of the region sometimes impact members of all races in comparable ways, there are also opportunities to form coalitions that include all high-need residents. In the course of these efforts, advocates must not allow racial equity to be sacrificed to approaches that ignore the reality of racial discrimination.

## The Inland Empire

The Inland Empire—San Bernardino and Riverside counties—is a vast area that includes both urban and rural communities and has both communities that are almost entirely White and almost entirely nonwhite. In our three-dimensional analysis, it has some commonalities with the Central Valley: it is generally lower-performing and has moderate to low levels of disparity that are likely depressed due to the presence of larger numbers of low-income Whites. Economic opportunity and housing indicators fit this trend, reflecting regional disinvestment, but it also is both low-performing and highly-disparate on some crime and justice indicators—including incarceration. Both Riverside and San Bernardino are low-performing when it comes to democracy indicators (though

Riverside is highly disparate and San Bernardino is not).

Despite this resemblance to the Central Valley, however, it's important to understand the region in context with Los Angeles and other coastal counties. Those who can no longer afford the high cost of living on the coast are often displaced into the Inland Empire and many workers in the region labor for companies owned elsewhere. Both are symptoms of the region's economic dependence on—or sometimes exploitation by—richer areas. There are significant governance gaps in many areas of the region. But there is strong organizing and advocacy capacity as well, which will be much-needed as its larger neighbors export their challenges to the Inland Empire.

## LOS ANGELES COUNTY: A REGION OF ITS OWN

Los Angeles is the single largest county in California, and with three quarters of its 10 million residents being people of color, the greatest number of people laboring under disparities live there. Almost 40% of all the state's Black residents are Angelenos, for example, and the Latino

share of the county's population is approaching 50%. This means that disparities in Los Angeles have a huge impact and remedying them would significantly improve our future: eliminating racial disparities in Los Angeles would mean that 16,000 fewer Black Angelenos would be incar-

cerated, and over 850,000 Latinos would gain health insurance coverage. While the county as a whole ranks somewhat low in performance terms and is about average in terms of racial disparity, this obscures concerning findings within individual indicators and sub-county hotspots of need,

such as South L.A., the East Side, and Southeast Los Angeles.

One encouraging sign is that on several education indicators, Los Angeles County has comparatively modest levels of disparity and overall middle-of-the-road performance. There is a need for a boost in performance, but on certain indicators such as suspensions, Los Angeles County is high-performing and only moderately disparate. This reflects the work of students, parents, organizers, and teachers—impressive progress given the crisis-level challenges that have recently confronted districts in the county. There are nonetheless high disparities in some education indicators, such as third-grade math performance, and low performance on critical indicators like high school graduation rate, underscoring that much work remains to be done.

When it comes to democracy, the picture in L.A. is equivocal, since while it is generally low-performing, it is also among

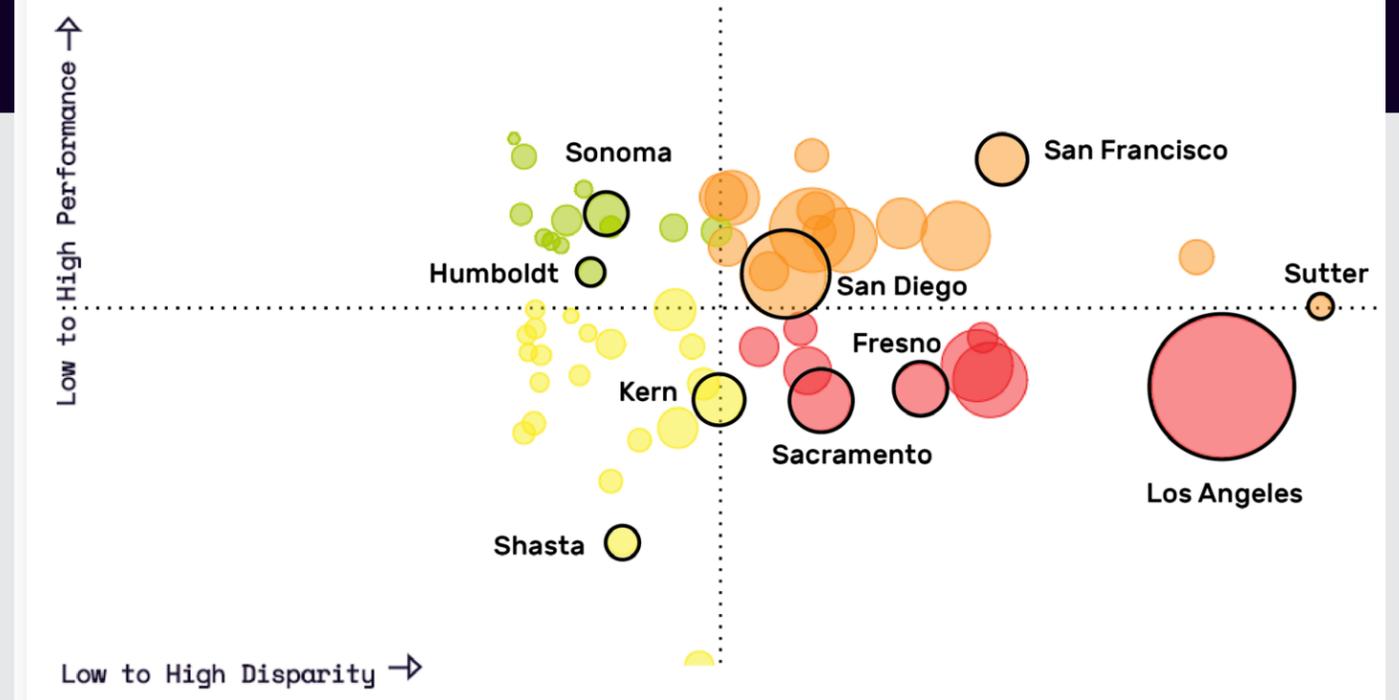
the lowest-disparity counties, for example, in turnout in presidential elections. This indicates that local advocates' efforts to mobilize their communities have been bearing fruit, though as in so many other areas, the path ahead for Los Angeles remains a long one.

In other issue areas, though, people of color in Los Angeles County confront a much harsher landscape. The incarceration rate is among the highest in the state and the county also has the second-highest level of disparity: the incarceration rate for Black Angelenos is more than 10 times the rate for Whites. Criminalization of Black and brown youth is a continuing problem—while schools have made progress in reducing suspensions, Los Angeles has the worst rate of truancy arrests in the state, with a high degree of racial disparity. The county has also often invested in law enforcement as a one-size-fits-all solution to social challenges such as mental health and

homelessness. County leaders are beginning to change course and make smarter investments, but this history is perhaps one reason L.A. is a low performer when it comes to preventable hospitalizations.

L.A. County is low-performing and highly-disparate on both housing and healthy built environment indicators, which are likely interrelated. Because of rising rents and high cost of living, people of color have often been pushed into or kept in neighborhoods that lack park access or are near unsafe industrial hazards. Because property values are so high in much of the county, when new polluting usages or industrial areas are built, they are disproportionately located in communities of color. Unable to afford rising rents, many people of color are increasingly displaced to far-flung regions of the county—or even into neighboring counties altogether. On some indicators, this may lead to Los Angeles appearing to improve,

## Incarceration



**Scatterplot of the incarceration indicator. Los Angeles, the largest county in the state, is also low performing and very highly disparate.**

but exporting those challenges to Riverside or San Bernardino will not improve outcomes either for those who leave or those who are left behind.

Advocates in L.A. are well aware of these challenges and have won numerous campaigns to improve the lives of people of color, including raising the minimum wage, creating an equity-based funding formula for Los Ange-

les Unified School District, and expanding the county safety net program to cover Angelenos regardless of documentation status. Their ongoing work includes advocating against the criminalization of youth and moving a decarceration agenda, promoting truly affordable housing for communities at risk of being priced out, and leaning into successes in the education arena to target investments to the students with

the most at stake. But given Los Angeles County's size and its persistent race-based disparities, the work of advocates and organizers continues to be critical to improving outcomes.

## Race and Class

As we have mentioned several times throughout this report, it is challenging, and at times unfruitful, to attempt to divorce race from class. There is much more work remaining to be done at the intersection of race and class to explore the full contours of California's racial landscape and the dynamics that determine how overall racial disparities impact different communities. Sometimes a county's level of racial disparities is largely determined by the amount of income and class inequality between Whites. For example, a major difference between higher-disparity Fresno and lower-disparity Kern is that median household income for Whites is almost \$10,000 lower in Kern. The presence of a particular community of color that has a higher degree of education and therefore economic mobility can also make a significant impact.

Unpacking these questions is not simply an academic exercise. Exploring the intersection of race and class is necessary because it can help illuminate the ways in which the movement for racial equity can stand alongside economic justice movements in communities of low-income Whites. Attempting to create class-based coalitions that ignore racial injustice are likely doomed to failure—true solidarity of the working classes, as envisioned in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Poor People's Campaign, requires a sensitive understanding of the way race-based discrimination has been used against workers of all classes and a shared commitment to achieving full equity. We intend to delve further into these intersections through future work in the RACE COUNTS initiative.

## Findings in Disparity by County Type

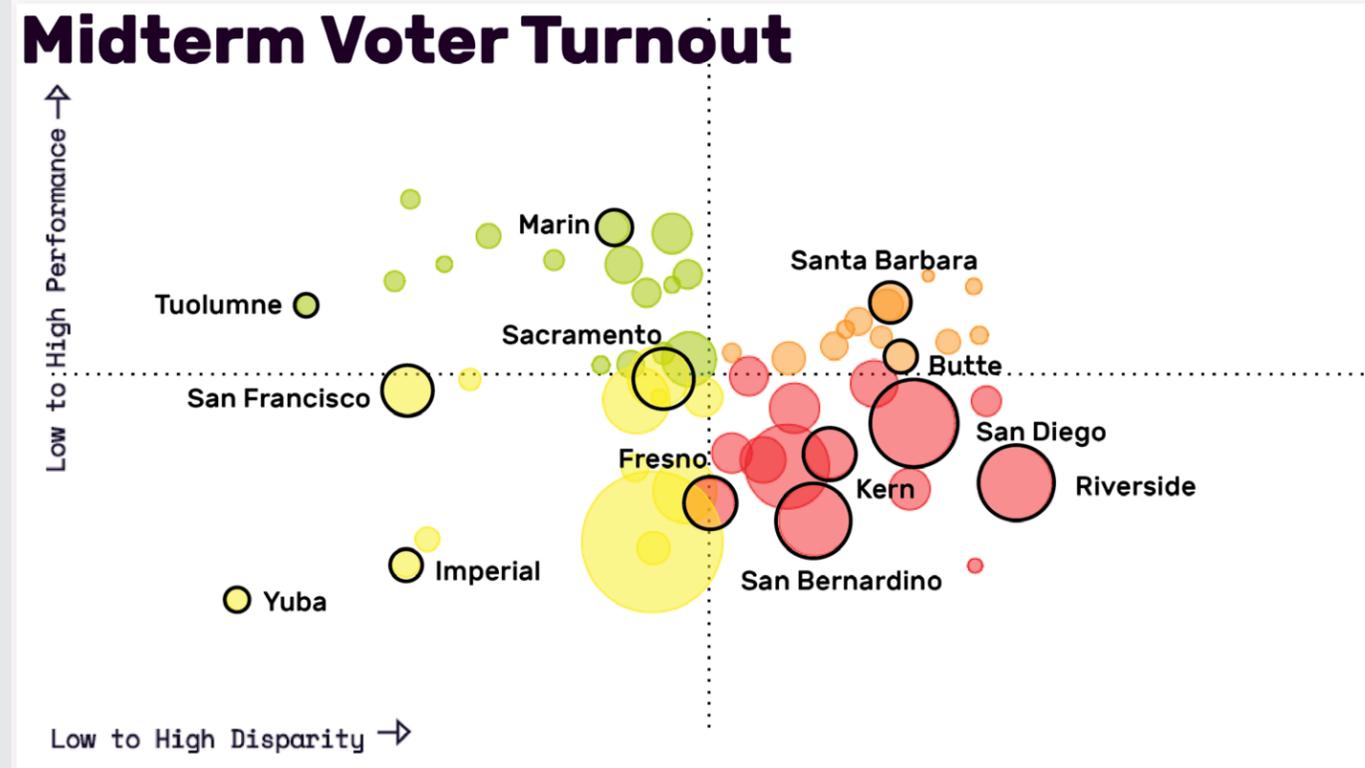
Counties in the same region may be very different from each other, and conversely, far-flung counties may share characteristics based on where they fall in the performance-disparity distribution or the political leanings of their residents and policymakers.

## Political Leaning

The political leaning of a county may be relevant to its level of performance and race-based disparities, since depending on the political opinions of a majority of voters, policymakers may pursue systematically different approaches to these issues. They may put a high priority on addressing racial disparities or may not see them as a problem independent of overall performance levels.

There are many ways to quantify county-level political inclinations, including voter registration by party, party affiliation of elected officials, or responses to relevant public opinion survey questions—each with their own strengths and pitfalls. As a first step in exploring the interaction between politics and disparity, we compared counties according to the two-party margin in the 2016 presidential election, though more work will be needed to grapple with the full nuances of the issue.

Perhaps surprisingly, we did not find strong connections between disparity data and political leaning. One of the stronger findings—though still relatively weak—is that counties that leaned more towards the Democratic party in their national voting tended to have slightly higher disparities in both crime and justice and housing indicators. While there are surely additional factors driving this relationship, it behooves leaders in these communities to focus increased attention to these key issues and consider whether their solutions are adequate to the tasks at hand.



Scatterplot of the voter turnout in midterm elections indicator. Many higher-population counties are both lower-performing and higher-disparity.

## FINDINGS IN DISPARITY BY ISSUE

### ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY (SIXTH MOST DISPARATE ISSUE)

Many counties in California have relatively lower disparities when it comes to economic opportunity, but this can risk painting too optimistic a picture. In many counties, income inequality and the class divide mean that on average Whites are lower-performing and overall racial disparity is similarly smaller. San Francisco and Fresno counties are among the exceptions. In San Francisco, disparities tend to be in the context of high prosperity not being shared equitably, a trend that's clearly visible when looking at median household income in the county. The exception to this high-performance, high-disparity trend is homeownership, where performance in San Francisco is unsurprisingly very low and also highly-disparate—a significant barrier given that for most Americans, the greatest store of wealth they have available to them is a home.

Fresno County, meanwhile, much like other parts of the Central Valley often has low performance on these indicators. On poverty rates, it is tied for the worst in the state, alongside a high degree of disparity. While some racial

groups are doing comparatively better in Fresno, this masks the need for concerted action to create broader economic opportunity for all—such as regional and statewide campaigns to increase wages and raise more revenue for investment in jobs and education. Notably, there are efforts underway to close some of the most egregious corporate loopholes in Proposition 13, which benefit older, larger companies at the expense of homeowners and entrepreneurs. If successful, these policy changes would empower currently revenue-starved local governments to make significant investments in their communities' future.

### DEMOCRACY (SEVENTH MOST DISPARATE ISSUE)

While there are certainly significant race-based disparities in political participation in California, according to our data they generally appear smaller than in other issue areas. California has seen sustained efforts by organizers to increase democratic participation by communities of color, including campaigns to register and mobilize voters of color and increase census participation, which have begun to turn the tide and show the path by which equity gains

may be realized and, eventually, locked in.

There is no cause for complacency, however, because the remaining disparities within democratic participation are real, and uniquely dangerous because political power is necessary to address all other disparities. The indicators where disparities persist are among the most consequential. For example, turnout in midterm elections is an indicator where most high-population counties are in the high-disparity, low-performance “Stuck and Unequal” quadrant—which is troubling given that California elects its governor and other important officials in midterm years. There are troubling signs that racial disparities in political participation are being replicated in the Millennial generation.<sup>39</sup> The indicators available to us also center largely on voting, meaning that we have only an incomplete picture of disparities in other forms of political participation. There are also limitations in data availability that mean that our understanding of how disparities in democracy impact Indigenous peoples, Blacks, and other communities of color remains incomplete.

## High-Performance, Low-Disparity Counties

There are a small number of mid-sized counties that on our composite index have generally moderate to high performance, and disparities that are smaller than the statewide averages. These include Santa Clara County, Orange County, San Diego County, and Sacramento County—counties that seem to have little in common in terms of geography, dominant industry, or local political leanings. It's important not to overstate the progress that they have made: no county in California has come close to achieving racial equity, and digging below the composite index, there are many specific indicators where these counties have low performance or high disparity levels. However, these four counties are doing comparatively better than most others,

and it's worth considering whether there is anything common to them that might explain this trend.

One thread that may link these four counties is that they each have at least one nonwhite racial group that is doing better, especially in terms of socioeconomic status. In Orange County, for example, Whites' median household income is twenty percent higher than their statewide average, but Blacks in Orange County have household income that is over fifty percent higher than the average for Blacks statewide. Although Blacks are still making much less than Whites (\$65,795 vs. \$86,481), nonetheless Black-White income inequality is smaller in Orange County than the rest of the state. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders also have

household incomes significantly higher than the state average and, therefore, come closer to Whites than they do elsewhere. Notably, Latinos in Orange County continue to struggle, with household income that is only 19% higher than the statewide average—in line with the increase for Whites. There are also an estimated quarter-million undocumented people in Orange County, whose experience may not be captured in these figures.<sup>37</sup>

There are similar dynamics in Santa Clara County (where Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders and multiracial residents have relatively higher incomes), San Diego (relatively higher Black and Native American income), and Sacramento (Indigenous peoples and Latinos have relatively higher income, and Asian Americans and

non-Hispanic Whites do relatively less well). While analyzing the causes behind this dynamic is challenging, it is potentially relevant that there are relatively more public-sector jobs in both Sacramento (due to the state government) and San Diego (due to the military bases), since in general the public sector has a larger share of employees of color than does the private sector.<sup>38</sup>

As discussed earlier, class-based inequality is a major driver of racial disparities because of the way that people of color have been denied economic mobility over the decades. It may therefore be the case that in these counties, where the economic order is slightly less segregated by race, other racial disparities are also beginning to break down. Again, even in these relatively lower-dis-

parity, higher-performing counties, there are still many communities of color that are being left behind. Further, countywide racial aggregates may conceal higher disparities if the higher-income members of a racial group are distinct in some way from the lower-income members, in terms of ethnicity or national origin, immigration status, or geographic location within the county. In Orange County, for example, there are hot-spots of high need such as Santa Ana, Anaheim, and much of the northern and central portions of the county. As a result, deeper study is needed to fully understand what lessons, if any, these counties have for California as a whole.

# 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the history and intersecting inequities that created our modern-day systems, and the broad and severe racial disparities these systems continue to produce, there can be no credible debate about the immediate need for transformation. The question of how to accomplish this, though, lacks a simple answer. As we have acknowledged through the course of this report, disparities exist at a complex intersection of region, racial and ethnic group, issue area, class, and more. Further, racial injustice has deep roots in California—it was built into our public systems from the beginning and has been nurtured and evolved over generations. The effort to untangle these intersections and pull up these roots will require a commensurate level of intentionality, coordination, and sustained attention and resources over a long period of time.

With RACE COUNTS, we are presenting a framework to understand these systems and conditions in a new way and to support efforts to build capacity and cohesion around racial justice work throughout California. There will not be a single plan of action that applies everywhere in the state—due to the county variation we have identified, it is clear that decisions must be made locally and then flow upwards into coordinated statewide action.

## Local Engagement and Movement-Building

We hope that our initial findings—alongside the far more detailed data now available at [RACECOUNTS.org](https://RACECOUNTS.org)—can support local conversations across the state about the unique racial equity dynamics and needs at play in each region or county. Groups acting alone, whether inside or outside of government, are unlikely to succeed in reversing deeply-rooted systemic injustice, so these conversations will be most impactful if conducted by a broad set of partners across racial groups, as well as sectors: advocates and organizers, government officials, and economic leaders.

Where such tables can be created or sustained, with shared commitment to reach cohesion, a plan to obtain resources for long-term engagement, and knowl-

edge and information sharing to achieve maximum impact, the result will be powerful. It will be most important to create space for community residents most impacted by racial inequity to have a say in decision-making, as they have a deeper, first-hand experience of the harms created by these systems that goes beyond what any data project can ever understand on its own, the expertise to know how to heal their communities, and the will to fight for justice.

The three-dimensional analysis of racial equity we have presented—looking to performance, disparity, and impact—can help to jump-start these conversations. We understand that there is not simply one form of systemic racism in California, but rather, that it comes in many forms

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across the state. Our framework can support the development of customized policy and power-building strategies unique to each region and the specific issue where there is the most need or most opportunity. From these North Stars, successful coalitions and narratives can be developed.

While there are no shortcuts to avoid the hard work of fleshing out these analyses, a few clear

principles already emerge from our findings. Advocates in “Gains at Risk” counties that are both high-performing and low-disparity should be mindful of the need to protect their gains and can use data to identify the high-need communities and issues that may be concealed by a more positive countywide picture. Meanwhile, in low-performing, low-disparity “Struggling to Prosper” counties, there is an urgent need to focus efforts on the highest-need areas and build new coalitions to create solidarity across all racial groups and take on the shared challenge, but it will be important for coalitions to center their efforts on achieving racial equity. There is much more to learn that can help guide effective systems-change strategies and we look forward to developing more detailed recommendations in the future.

## Taking on the Drivers of Disparity

Beyond conversation and coalition-building, concerted action will also be needed—both locally and statewide—to take on the four drivers of racial disparity that we have outlined:

### SYSTEMS THAT TURN BIAS INTO DISPARITY:

All of our public systems, but especially those dedicated to criminal justice and public safety, need reforms to root out the impact of bias and stereotyping. By thoughtfully updating practices related to training and hiring, as well as increasing transparency, accountability, and robust community engagement, our public institutions can regain the public trust and deliver equitable results that do not target nonwhite Californians. For example, PICO California’s Building Trust Through

Reform campaign is working to transform public safety by reforming local law-enforcement departments’ hiring practices, equipment and tactics, and training, as well as creating new systems for accountability.

### EXCLUSIONARY PATTERNS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

California’s economy will not return to what it was in the mid-twentieth century—nor should we want it to—but business leaders must work with advocates and policymakers to ensure that gains are shared more equitably and that the traditional spaces where economic development decisions have been made are opened to new participants representing communities of color. Unions have been responsible for significant economic

mobility for people of color and will be key movement-building partners. The intertwined issues of good jobs and affordable, quality housing will be at the top of the agenda. Since gentrification and displacement play a key role in burdening communities of color, efforts to remedy the housing crisis through constructing new affordable units and strengthening tenants’ rights will be critical. And in addition to creating immediate job opportunities, progress will also depend on developing upstream interventions. Finally, the Make it Fair campaign to close commercial property tax loopholes can help repair a fundamentally-flawed system that advantages large, incumbent businesses and is biased against entrepreneurs and homeowners. These reforms will also help give localities the resources they need to invest in shared prosperity.

### IMBALANCE IN POLITICAL POWER:

The shifting demographics of California mean that in many

places, there continues to be a significant mismatch between the governed and those who govern, which is a treacherous position for a representative democracy to occupy. Increased voter registration and turnout by people of color is one important ingredient, such as the inspiring Million Voters Project. More must be done to create stronger systems of public engagement that can allow for effective partnerships with communities of color and give impacted residents a say in budget and policy decisions. It’s also necessary to build the capacity of communities of color to engage in political participation beyond elections—through efforts such as the Census Policy Advocacy Network’s campaign to ensure all Californians are counted when allocating political power and public funding.

### USE OF NEED- AND COLOR-BLIND POLICIES TO PERPETUATE DISPARITIES:

Because California’s governing policies and systems are over-

whelmingly color-blind, a necessary threshold step for addressing this driver is conducting a series of comprehensive reviews to determine which current policies do the most to perpetuate racial disparities—so that advocates can develop plans to revise or eliminate them. Just as importantly, Californians will need to creatively develop new policies that proactively address race-based disparities through targeted investments and new programming or interventions. One example is the school-site-level Student Equity Need Index that advocates are calling on the Los Angeles Unified School District to use as a guide for funding decisions. Policymakers should also create and use racial-impact assessments to vet new policies for unintended consequences, like those created by Race Forward. Collaboratives like the Government Alliance for Race and Equity can help leaders strategize together and share best practices.

## Improving Data Quality and Equity

In the course of our analysis, we identified many data gaps and limitations that create important barriers to presenting the full scale of race-based disparities in California. The following recommendations, directed at those who collect and publish data, would help end these gaps and allow all communities of color to more fully be seen, and see themselves, in official statistics.

Data broken down by race should be collected and published whenever possible, especially at the local, census-tract level. There are several important indicators where this data is only available in larger geographies, including housing quality and incarceration rates.

Wherever possible, data should be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and national origin. This is especially important for Asian-American and Native-Hawaiian and Pacific-Islander communities, since the category labels can mask very wide variation. Latinos should also be consistently broken out separately from Whites, as their experiences in California are very different.

Those who collect data should devote sufficient resources to allow for adequate sampling of smaller or harder-to-count populations, such as Indigenous peoples and many Asian-American subgroups. This is especially the case for the Census' civic-participation data collection, which currently does not provide county-level data by race that is sufficiently reliable for analysis.

Finally, more data should be made available through online open-data portals, rather than held back behind laborious, expensive, and slow individual application processes.

## In Conclusion

We recognize that, taken together, all of this represents a generation or more of work. This report is only the first portion of the RACE COUNTS initiative. Now that we have gathered baseline data and begun ground-truthing our understanding of the racial disparities we have found, we are committed to expanding and building on this foundation to support the advocates and leaders working tirelessly to bring justice and equity to their communities. First, recognizing that detail below the county level will be crucial, we will extend our analysis by looking at disparities in the hundred cities in California with the largest populations of people of color. We will also update the entire dataset available at RACECOUNTS.org with refreshed data as it becomes available, to better understand trends in disparity over time and

whether particular counties are improving or losing ground.

Further, in the months and years to come, we will publish issue area reports using our three-dimensional equity framework to explore the policies and practices that can reduce disparities in areas like health care and criminal justice. Finally, we will also explore the data-collection challenges and opportunities identified through this report in more detail, focusing on specific populations.

This moment is long overdue. Building power, creating solidarity, and developing effective campaigns to move the needle requires time—so progress will always be slower than it needs to be. But despite the scale of the task that confronts us, there is reason for optimism. In California, we have the tools for change.

Due to our inherited legacy of movement-building and solidarity, we are fortunate to have the resources, political ecology, and organizing and advocacy strength to take on the challenge of racial injustice. It is now up to us to make use of these tools, and make sure the California we pass down is fairer, better, and stronger than the one we were given.

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