Priced Out:
RELOCATION AMIDST CALIFORNIA'S AFFORDABLITY CRISIS

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Executive Summary

Growing costs of living are squeezing Californians' pocketbooks and causing some households to consider relocating. Using unique data that anonymously tracks the same households over time from 2016 to 2025, this report examines how many Californians are moving, who is leaving the state, where they are going, and what happens to their finances after they move.

The findings suggest that affordability plays a major role in Californians' relocation decisions. Californians who leave move to much more affordable areas and see large increases in homeownership, on average. At the same time, the data show how more people continue to leave the state than choose to move here, a gap that is reshaping California's population.

Key findings

- **Californians are leaving the state for more affordable communities and improving their financial position.** On average, movers relocate to neighborhoods where monthly housing costs are $672 less. After seven years, they are 48% (or 11 percentage-points) more likely to own a home.

- **People moving out of California increasingly come from higher-income neighborhoods and appear financially weaker than their neighbors.** The share of exits from higher-income neighborhoods rose 19% over the last decade. Those who leave have $5,500 more in student debt, on average, and credit scores that were 17 points lower than their neighbors.

- **Proximity drives relocation popularity, with Nevada claiming the top spot.** Nearby states receive the most Californians per capita. Nevada is the standout, receiving a net 81 Californians per 10,000 residents annually, followed by Idaho, Oregon, and Arizona. Contrary to most headlines, Texas and Florida rank only 11th and 20th, respectively.

- **There is still a gap between entrances to California and exits, though it has narrowed since the pandemic.** While exits have moderated from their pandemic peak, there are now fewer people moving into the state, a trend that continues to drag on California's population growth.

1. Seeking Affordability

California's affordability crisis

California is unusually expensive. While Americans nationwide face rising costs of living, California remains an outlier. Housing costs for even the least costly communities in California exceed those of most other places in the United States.[1] Californians also face higher prices for essentials like groceries, gas, and utilities, which cost 11%,[2] 40%,[3] and 61%[4] higher than the national average, respectively.

Higher housing prices may in part reflect California's desirability. With natural beauty, mild climate, world-renowned universities, and economic opportunity (e.g., in technology and entertainment), California's many amenities undoubtedly contribute to higher prices. Higher incomes in California have also made it possible for many residents to make ends meet. But the state's affordability issues have deepened in recent years, and residents are feeling the pinch. For example, in 2012 the state's median household income was roughly sufficient to qualify for a mortgage on a mid-tier home, but it now falls substantially short of the level needed to qualify for even a bottom-tier home.[5]

One way to lower one's cost of living is to move someplace cheaper. In this report, we use a uniquely detailed source of anonymized individual-level data — sourced from one of the three nationwide credit bureaus — to observe where Californians moved between 2016 and 2025.[6] For each mover, we can observe what neighborhood they left and where they moved. We can also observe information about their financial well-being before and after their move. We do not know why they moved, or how they chose their new location, but looking at the data helps us understand some of the likely factors. We use regression models to estimate how much, on average, movers' economic and financial situations change between the quarter before their move and the years after their move. Intuitively, this approach gives us a sense of how much the average mover improved their financial situation relative to their life just before they relocated.[7]

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1   E.g., **Bentz 2025**.

2   **Household Pulse Survey 2023**.

3   **US Energy Information Administration 2025**.

4   **US Bureau of Economic Analysis 2024**.

5   **Bentz 2025**.

6   We use the **University of California Consumer Credit Panel** (UC-CCP), a longitudinal panel of ~60M Americans with credit records, quarterly from 2004 to present. We use a 1% nationally representative sample for most analyses. For each quarter, we see the location (census tract and ZIP) and demographics of each anonymized individual, as well as detailed information about their credit cards, auto and student loans, mortgages, and other debts.

7   Our results in Part 1 use a regression specification that takes the form of a two-way fixed effects model, estimated on panel data, in which a move is the event of interest. The resulting estimates capture both changes in outcomes within a person, across quarters (relative to a person's pre-move situation), and within a given quarter, across people who have and have not yet moved. The model uses movers' own pre-move outcomes, combined with data from individuals who moved relatively late in our study period, to simulate a counterfactual world in which movers remained in their original neighborhoods. This statistical framework adjusts for unrelated developments over time that shape our data (for example, improvements in creditworthiness during the pandemic) and for person-level factors that might affect the benefits/costs of moving (for example, age and homeownership history). While the estimates can be interpreted as causal under certain assumptions, we do not make a causal claim here and instead treat our estimates as suggestive evidence.

Californians are leaving for cheaper locations

One thing is clear: Californians are moving to more affordable locations. **The average mover from California relocates to a neighborhood where monthly housing costs are $672 lower than in the community they left (Figure 1).**[8] As a result, far fewer (-22%) of their new neighbors are cost-burdened by housing.[9]

FIGURE 1. Neighborhood average monthly housing costs
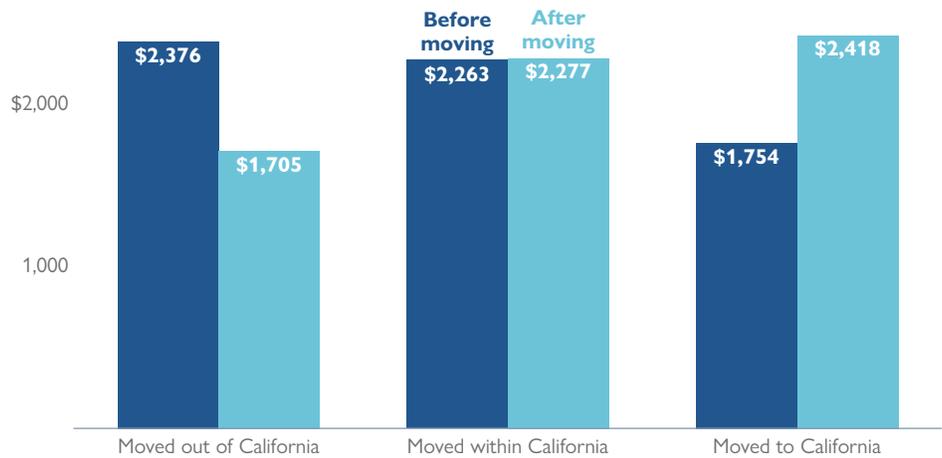
Note: Housing costs include mortgage and rent payments, utilities, property taxes, and insurance. Estimated differences in housing costs come from separate regressions that control for individual move and time effects. The "before moving" period refers to the quarter just before a person moved, while the "after moving" period refers to the quarter immediately after a person moved. The sample consists of individuals in the UC-CCP who moved between 2016 and 2025. The data are inflated to 2025Q4 dollars.

Source: California Policy Lab analysis of UC Consumer Credit Panel and American Community Survey data.

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8   This includes mortgage and rent payments, utilities, property taxes, and home insurance.

9   Defined as spending 30% or more of income on housing.

This is true for both renters and homeowners. For renters, rents are about 30% (or about $631) lower in their new neighborhood. For homeowners, the median home in their new neighborhood costs almost $396,000 (or 48%) less than the median home in their old neighborhood (Figure 2).[10] Perhaps because of these lower home prices, homeownership is also more common in their new neighborhood, where 60% own their homes, compared to 53% in the California neighborhood they left.

FIGURE 2: Neighborhood median home values

Note: Home values are based on the neighborhood (Census tract) a person lived in just before/after moving. Estimated differences in home values come from a regression specification that controls for individual and move and time effects as well as a quartic of the person's age. The "before moving" period refers to the quarter just before a person moved, while the "after moving" period refers to the quarter immediately after a person moved. The sample consists of individuals in the UC-CCP who moved between 2016 and 2025. The data are inflated to 2025Q4 dollars.
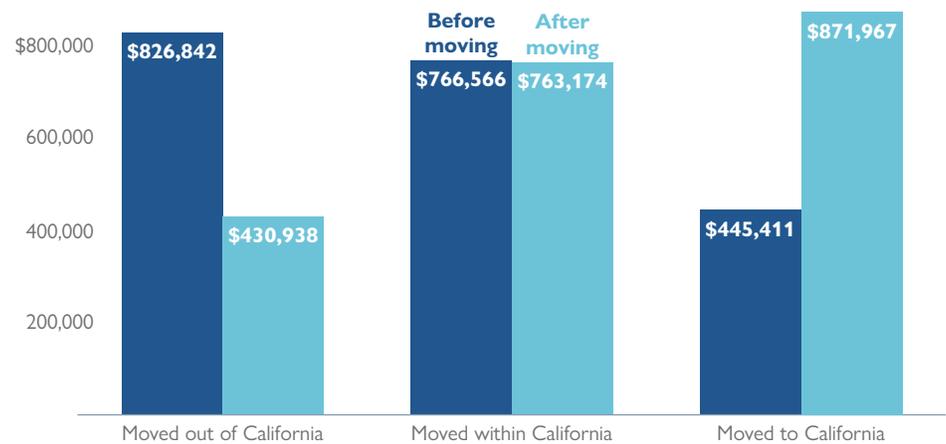
Source: California Policy Lab analysis of UC Consumer Credit Panel and American Community Survey data

There is a tradeoff in that incomes in their destination neighborhoods are also lower, by about $339 (or 8%) per month on average.[11] But that income difference is far outweighed by the lower costs of living. And some transplants may be able to keep their California salaries and work remotely.

In sum, Californians who left the state in the last decade chose communities that are, on average, considerably more affordable than the ones they left. Though we cannot know their personal reasons for moving, this is suggestive evidence that affordability is driving their decision to move, or at least their choice of destination.

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10 To put this number into perspective, in late 2019, just before the onset of the pandemic, the price of the median home sold in the United States was about $412,000, after adjusting for inflation (FRED 2025).

11 Median gross per-capita income from the American Community Survey data, 2019 and 2023.

Leavers are more likely to become homeowners

Our data allow us to anonymously track movers during the years after they leave California. We can then compare their financial outcomes to those that choose to stay in California and to those that move into or within the state.

So what happens to Californians who leave? If people relocate for more affordable locations, one might expect to see some improvement in their financial condition over time. One proxy for financial success is owning a home, something that has become increasingly difficult for young Californians to do because of high home prices.

We find that Californians who left the state were much more likely to own a home a few years later (Figure 3). That likelihood grows over time such that seven years after leaving California, movers were 11 percentage points (or 48%) more likely to be a homeowner than those who stayed in the state, even after controlling for age.

By contrast, those who chose to move to California were only 6 percentage points (or 27%) more likely to be homeowners seven years after arriving than they were before they came to California.

FIGURE 3: CA exiters are more likely to become homeowners

Percentage-point change in homeownership in the years after moving
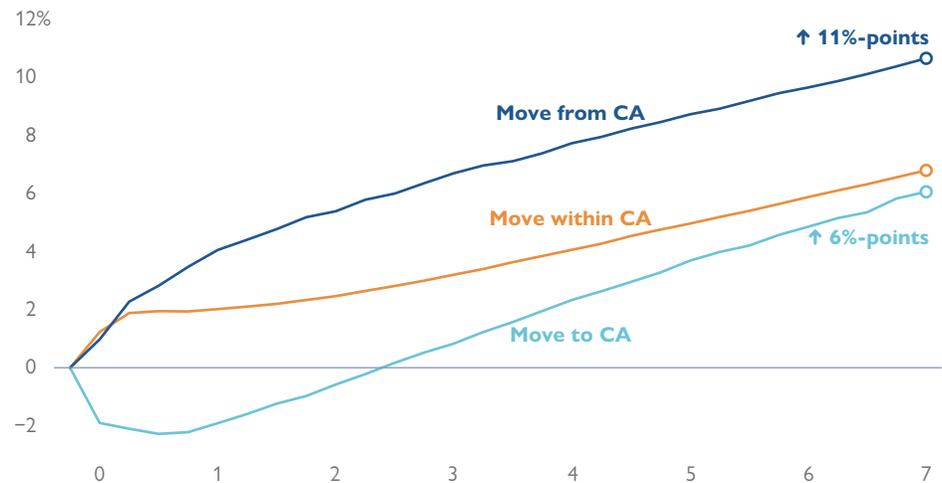
Note: The data show the changes in the rates at which people own their own homes, relative to just before they moved, by year since (or before) moving. Estimated changes in homeownership come from a regression specification that controls for individual and move and time effects as well as a quartic of the person's age. Just before relocating, about 22% of movers of each type were homeowners. The sample consists of individuals in the UC-CCP who moved between 2016 and 2019.

Source: California Policy Lab analysis of University of California Consumer Credit Panel (UC-CCP) data.

2.   Comfortable, but Constrained

Exiters increasingly leave from high-income neighborhoods

If costs are driving exits from California, one might expect that movers come largely from lower-income neighborhoods. But that is not what we see. The share of movers from California's lower-income communities is declining.[12] Instead, **the share of Californians leaving the state from higher-income communities increased 6.4 percentage points (19%) between the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic periods** (Figure 4). The average exiter now leaves from a neighborhood that is 8.7% more affluent than in the pre-pandemic period.

FIGURE 4: Californians are increasingly leaving from wealthier areas

Shares of California exits by income of the departure neighborhood
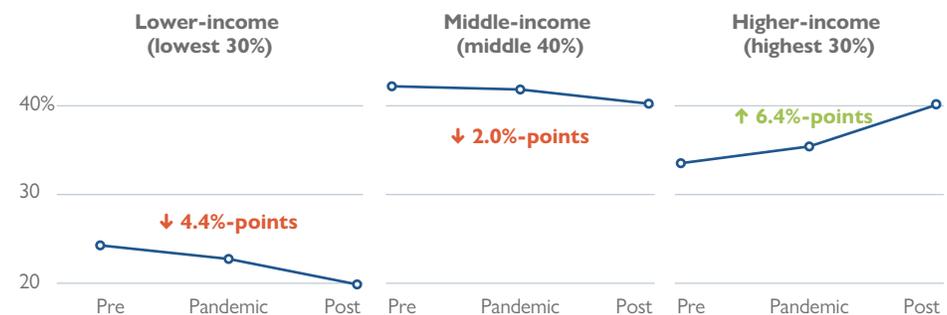
Note: In this chart we define "lower-income" to include the bottom 30% of census tracts by per-capita income (for these deciles: $18,673, $24,316, and $29,173). "Middle-income" includes the middle 40% of tracts (for these deciles: $34,117, $39,798, $45,875, and $53,111). "Higher-income" includes the top 30% of tracts (for these deciles: $63,032, $77,848, and $109,546). Time periods are 2016-19 (Pre), 2020-22 (Pandemic), and 2023-25 (Post).

Source: California Policy Lab analysis of UC Consumer Credit Panel (UC-CCP) data

A similar dynamic is taking place for moves *within* the Golden State. The share of movers to other parts of California who come from higher-income neighborhoods has increased 5.2 percentage points since the years before the pandemic, and now stands at 33%. Movers from lower- and middle-income communities now comprise 26% and 41% of statewide movers, respectively.

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12 For this analysis, we define "lower-income" to include the bottom 30% of census tracts by per-capita income (for these deciles: $18,673, $24,316, and $29,173). "Middle-income" includes the middle 40% of tracts (for these deciles: $34,117, $39,798, $45,875, and $53,111). "Higher-income" includes the top 30% of tracts (for these deciles: $63,032, $77,848, and $109,546). These are relative groupings, and do not equate to definitions of low, medium, and high income.

Exiters struggle to "keep up with the Joneses"

The average household leaving California is not poor in *absolute* terms, but they are *relatively* worse off than those around them. Colloquially, they show signs of not being able to "keep up with the Joneses."

Compared to their neighbors, movers show several indications of worse financial health. For example, exiters had credit scores that were 17 points lower than people from the same neighborhood who did not move (Table 1). Exiters also owe $5,500 more (twice as much) in student debt than their neighbors and have 16% (or 3.6 percentage points) higher rates of credit card utilization, which suggests that their credit cards are more "maxed out." Rates of homeownership were also 33% lower (or -11 percentage points) for exiters as compared to their neighbors. All these signals are consistent with the idea that exiters desire a quality of life that they cannot achieve in their old neighborhood.

TABLE 1: California exiters are financially weaker than their neighbors

	CA EXITERS	THEIR CA NEIGHBORS	DIFFERENCE
Credit score	688	705	-17 pts
Student debt	$10,990	$5,481	+$5,508
Auto loans	$6,101	$5,772	+$329
Credit card utilization	25.0%	21.4%	+3.6 %-pts
Homeowner?	22.7%	33.6%	-10.9 %-pts
Age	41.6	48.8	-7.2 yrs

Note: The data come from comparing the average characteristics of out-of-state movers and non-movers who lived in the same neighborhood (Census tract) in California. We re-weight these differences by the number of movers from each neighborhood so that the reported data reflect the characteristics of the average mover. The sample consists of people in the UC-CCP between 2016 and 2025 who resided in a California neighborhood with at least one out-of-state mover and one non-mover in a given quarter. Student and auto debt levels are inflated to 2025Q4 dollars.

Source: California Policy Lab analysis of University of California Consumer Credit Panel (UC-CCP) data.

3.   Leaving California for Where?

Californians mostly leave to, and come from, nearby states

When Californians leave, where do they move? **News reports often mention Texas, but that is misleading. The most accurate measure of popularity adjusts for state population and shows a clear pattern: proximity reigns.** Californians most often leave for nearby states, and California also welcomes new residents from neighboring states most frequently (Figure 5).

Nevada is the standout. It received an average of 226 Californians per 10,000 residents each year between 2016 and 2025. During that same time, 146 Nevadans per 10,000 moved to California each year. So on net, California sent 81 people per 10,000 annually to Nevada, making it by far the biggest net recipient of Californians in the nation on a per capita basis.

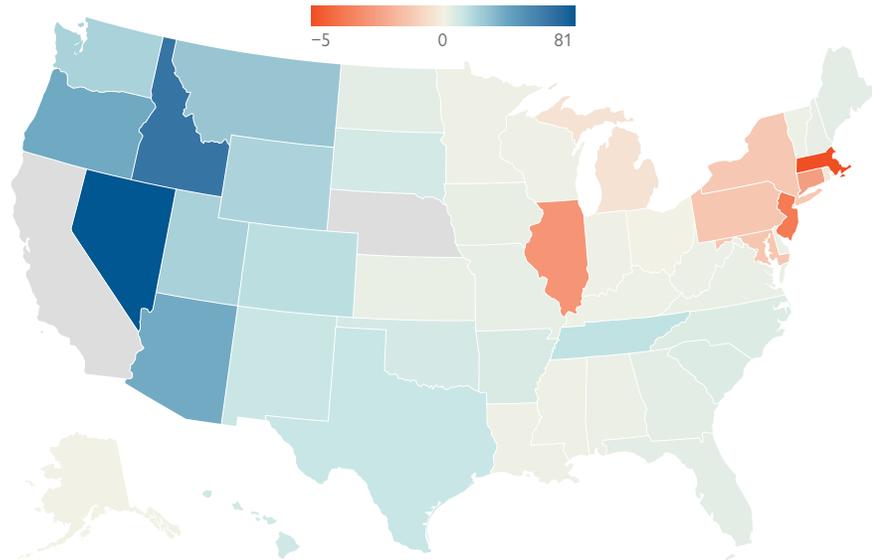FIGURE 5. Migration flows are largest for states near CA

Average annual arrivals, exits, and net flows to/from top 20 states per 10,000 (2016–25)
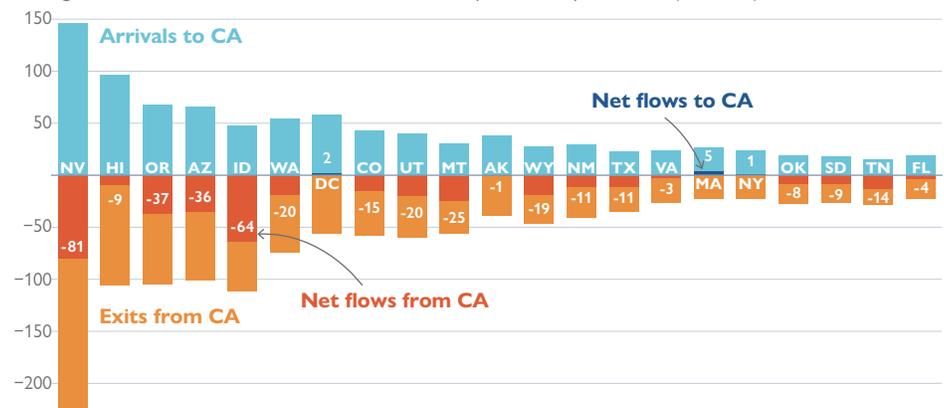
Source: California Policy Lab analysis of UC Consumer Credit Panel (UC-CCP) data.

FIGURE 6. Net migration from California

Average annual net inflow of Californians per 10,000 residents (2016–25)

Note: Values are weighted by the population of the non-CA state.

Source: California Policy Lab analysis of UC Consumer Credit Panel (UC-CCP) data

Idaho, Oregon, and Arizona were the next three highest net recipients of Californians, receiving 64, 37, and 36 per 10,000 over the last decade, respectively. Figure 6 shows that net migration from California generally decreases with distance. Texas is ranked 11th, and trails most states further west, as well as Tennessee to the east.

Over the last decade, most states saw net increases in the number of Californians they received per capita. In 2016, the average state received 3.4 more Californians, on net, per 10,000. That number rose to 15.2 in 2021 and then fell back to 5.6 by 2025, which is still 67% higher than in 2016. As a result, **the number of states that send more people to the Golden State than they receive is dropping.** In 2016, there were 25 states that sent more people to California than they received, but by 2025, that number had dropped to 13. Most of the remaining net-sending states are in the northeast (e.g., Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Connecticut).

Declining entrances deserve greater attention

Despite the media's consistent focus on exits, **a main driver of recent population trends was declining entrances to California.** Forty-two states now send fewer people to California than they did ten years ago (Figure 7). Western states, including Wyoming and Alaska, saw the steepest declines in entrances to California, with Idaho and New Mexico being notable exceptions. For the vast majority of states (34), declines in entrances to California outpaced increases in exits from California.

FIGURE 7. 42 states sent fewer people to CA since 2019

Change in average annual arrivals per 10,000 during 2020–25 as compared to pre-pandemic period (2016–19)
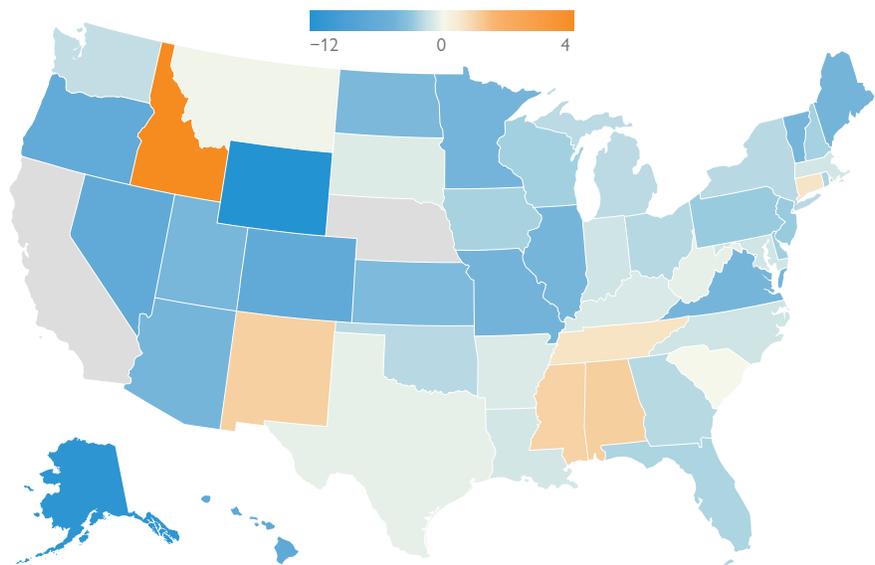
Note: Values are weighted by the population of the non-CA state.

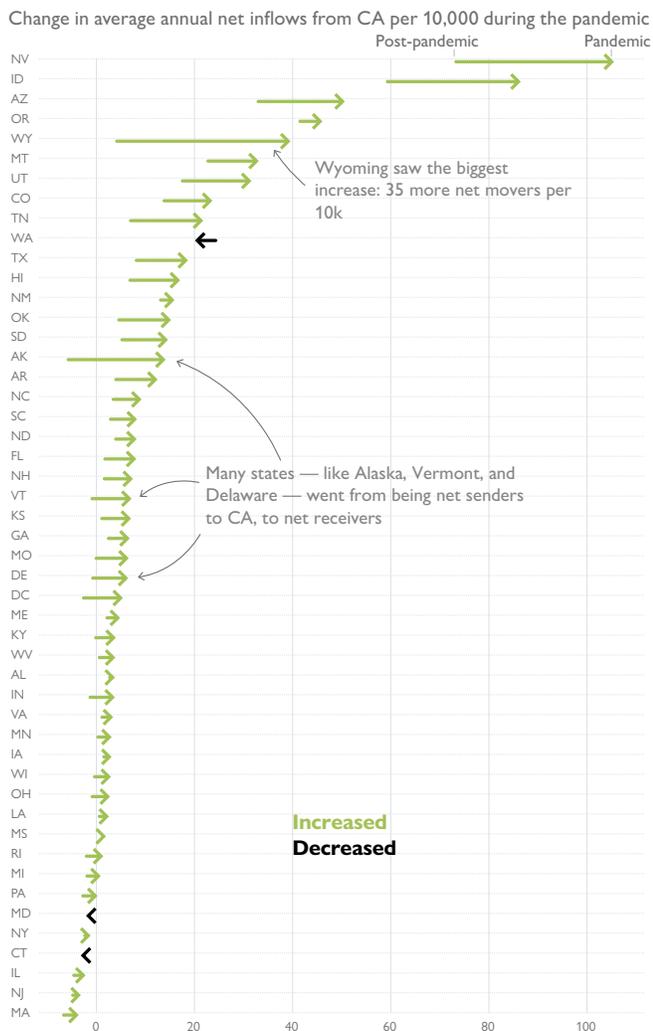Source: California Policy Lab analysis of UC Consumer Credit Panel (UC-CCP) data.

Pandemic fads have mostly subsided

Mover sources and destinations changed considerably during the pandemic. Nearly all states (46) experienced a "pandemic bump" in net inflow from California from 2020 to 2022 (left panel of Figure 8). Wyoming received the largest increase of more than 35 net movers per 10,000 annually. Nevada (+32) and Idaho (+27) saw notable increases as well, as did Alaska (+20), Arizona (+18), Tennessee (+15), and Utah (+14). Washington was one exception: it sent 4 more net movers to California per 10,000. The vast majority of moves (94%) were to neighborhoods classified as metropolitan, but the share of moves to less dense neighborhoods did notably jump over the last decade (up 14%, or 0.83 percentage points). This overall pattern fits with a national pandemic trend in which urbanites moved to less dense areas.[13]

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13 E.g., **Frost 2025a** and **Frost 2025b**. We use USDA Rural-Urban Commuting Area codes to classify census tracts (neighborhoods) as either part of metropolitan areas, micropolitan areas, small towns, or rural areas.

Those "pandemic bumps" largely dissipated over the last 3 years (right panel of Figure 8). For example, increases in Wyoming, Florida, and Tennessee receded by roughly half, while Texas's receded by 87%. Many popular destination states experienced full reversals of the pandemic trend, with post-pandemic inflows resetting even lower than pre-pandemic levels. These reversals characterize nearly all destination states west of the Rockies, as well as North Dakota, Vermont, and DC. Only states with more modest pandemic bumps — such as Illinois, New Jersey, and Massachusetts — saw their trend of increasing net inflows intensify in the post-pandemic period.
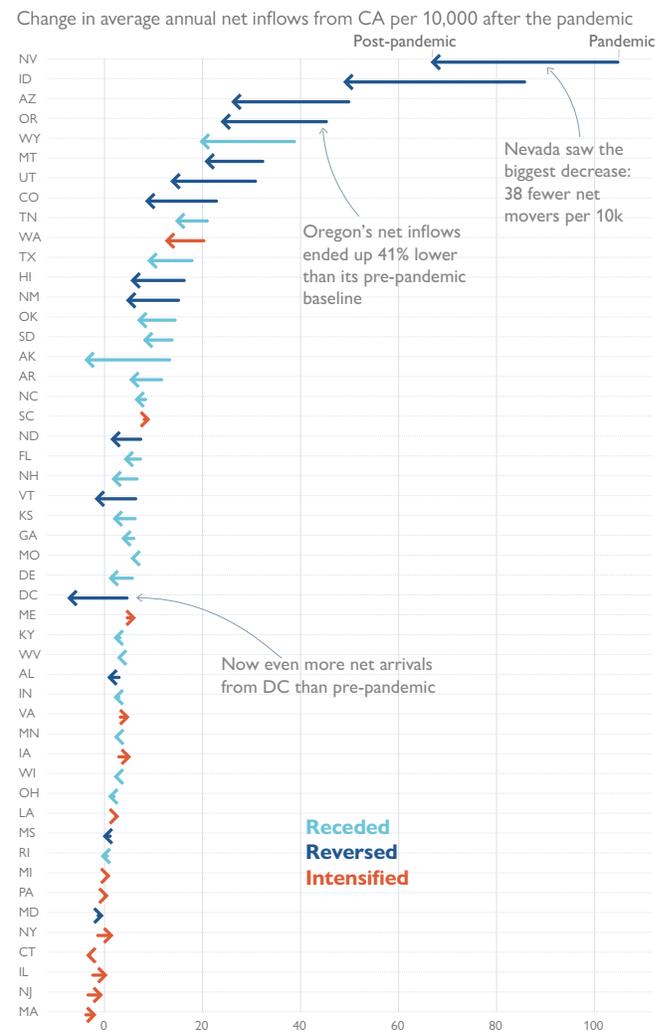
FIGURE 8. **Most states saw a "pandemic bump" in net movers from CA…**

Change in average annual net inflows from CA per 10,000 during the pandemic

Wyoming saw the biggest increase: 35 more net movers per 10k

Many states — like Alaska, Vermont, and Delaware — went from being net senders to CA, to net receivers

Increased
Decreased

Note: The start of each arrow is the pre-pandemic (2016–19) baseline average annual net inflow per 10k. The end of each arrow is the average annual net inflow per 10k during the pandemic (2020–22). The length of each arrow is the change between the pre-pandemic and pandemic periods. States are colored green if new inflows from CA increased during the pandemic, and black if they decreased. Values are weighted by the population of the non-CA state.

Source: California Policy Lab analysis of UC Consumer Credit Panel (UC-CCP) data

…but those trends mostly receded or reversed after the pandemic ended

Change in average annual net inflows from CA per 10,000 after the pandemic

Nevada saw the biggest decrease: 38 fewer net movers per 10k

Oregon's net inflows ended up 41% lower than its pre-pandemic baseline

Now even more net arrivals from DC than pre-pandemic

Receded
**Reversed**
Intensified

Note: The start of each arrow is the pandemic (2020–22) average annual net inflow per 10k. The end of each arrow is the average annual net inflow per 10k after the pandemic (2023–25). The length of each arrow is the change between the pandemic and post-pandemic periods. States are colored light blue if their inflows reduced post-pandemic, but remained higher than pre-pandemic (21 states); dark blue if their inflows reduced below pre-pandemic baseline (15 states); and orange if the pandemic trend later intensified (13 states). Values are weighted by the population of the non-CA state.

Source: California Policy Lab analysis of UC Consumer Credit Panel (UC-CCP) data

Despite these post-pandemic resets, rates of net outmigration from California were still higher for the vast majority of states (43) over the entire 2020–25 period than during the pre-pandemic period (Figure 9). Wyoming was the most extreme, with an additional net inflow of 26 Californians per 10,000. That amounts to about 9,050 more Californians moving to Wyoming, on net, over the six year period. Other states that saw a notable increase in net in-migration include Nevada (+13), Tennessee (+12), and Alaska (+10). On the flip side, six states sent more net movers to California during this period. Washington and Oregon sent more net movers to California after the pandemic (7 more and 6 more, respectively) suggesting that the Pacific Northwest may have become a less attractive destination for Californians.

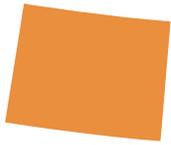FIGURE 9: Since 2019, California sent more net movers to 43 states

Change in average annual net inflow per 10,000 during 2020–25 as compared to pre-pandemic period (2016–19)
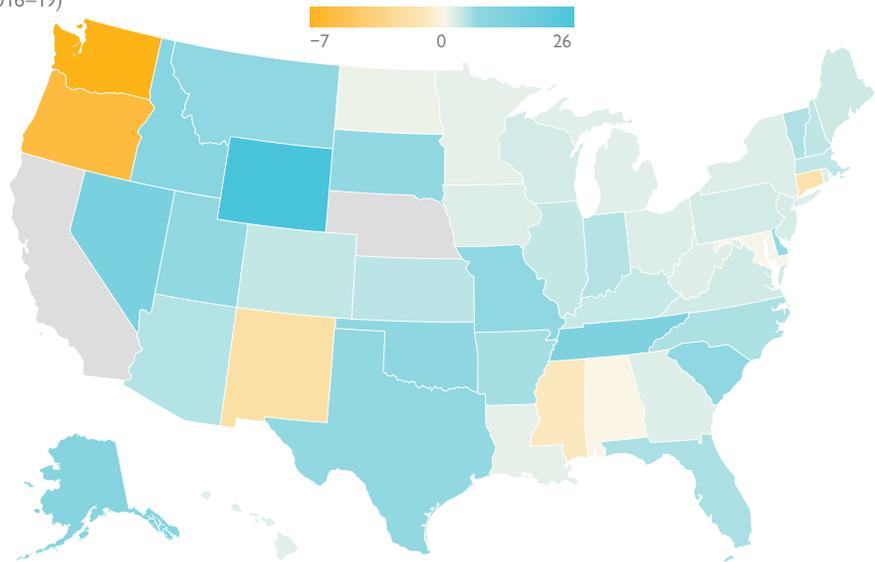
Note: Values are weighted by the population of the non-CA state.

Source: California Policy Lab analysis of UC Consumer Credit Panel (UC-CCP) data.

FIGURE 10. State spotlights

PANDEMIC MAGNET

Wyoming saw a huge pandemic surge, increasing its net inflow of Californians by 10x, from 4 to 39 per 10k. In more recent years that surge has ebbed but net inmigration is still elevated from pre-pandemic levels, at 20 per 10k.

TOP TRADE PARTNER

On a per-capita basis, **Nevada** has long been the most popular destination — and source — of moves from/to California, by a heavy margin. Nevada had a pandemic bump followed by a reversal, but its #1 ranking is safe.

MOST ONE-SIDED OUTFLOW

Idaho has the biggest "mover imbalance" with California of any state: for each Idahoan that moves to the Golden State, it receives more than two in return. In 2020, that ratio reached as high as 3.2.

ON THE RISE

Tennessee is an increasingly popular destination for California exiters. It received 20 per 10k during 2016–19 but 32 per 10k since then. Meanwhile, it consistently sent ~14 per 10k to California over the last decade, leaving it with the 2nd largest "mover imbalance."

LOSING LUSTER

Oregon and California have long swapped large numbers of residents, but recently Oregon seems less popular. Of all states, it experienced the largest drop in cumulative exits from California since 2019 (13 fewer per 10k on average annually).

Note: Values are weighted by the population of the non-CA state.

Source: California Policy Lab analysis of UC Consumer Credit Panel (UC-CCP) data.

4. Implications for California's Population

Outmigration is slowing population growth

One in nine Americans lives in California. At 39 million residents, California is not only the most populous state, it also has more population than the 22 least populous states combined.

But California's population is no longer growing like it once did (Figure 11). Steady population growth over the last 60 years started to taper in the 2010s. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the state experienced a net loss in population for the first time in its history. If trends continue, the implications for California's tax base and national political clout could be severe. For example, after losing one congressional seat in 2021, California is on track to lose three to four seats in Congress after the 2030 Census.[14]

FIGURE 11. Population growth of top 5 states
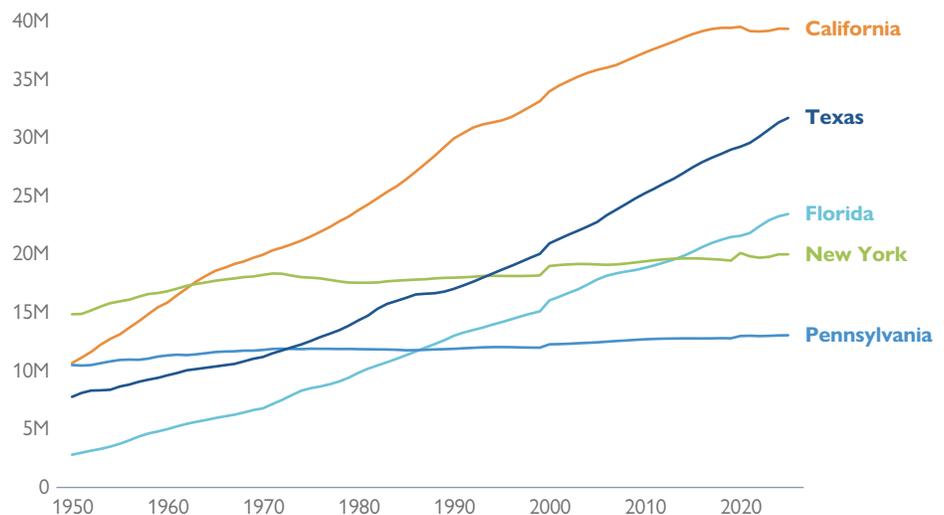
Source: U.S. Census Bureau via FRED®

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14 Zhu 2025.

Several factors contribute to the slowdown in California's population growth since 2000. Specifically, more Californians are dying, fewer are being born, and fewer immigrants are arriving from abroad. **But the biggest driver over the last 25 years is that entrances from other states have increasingly lagged behind exits from California.** Figure 12 decomposes the state's population change since 2000, showing that net domestic outmigration (light blue line below) has been a consistent and mostly growing issue.

FIGURE 12. Components of California's population change, 2000–25
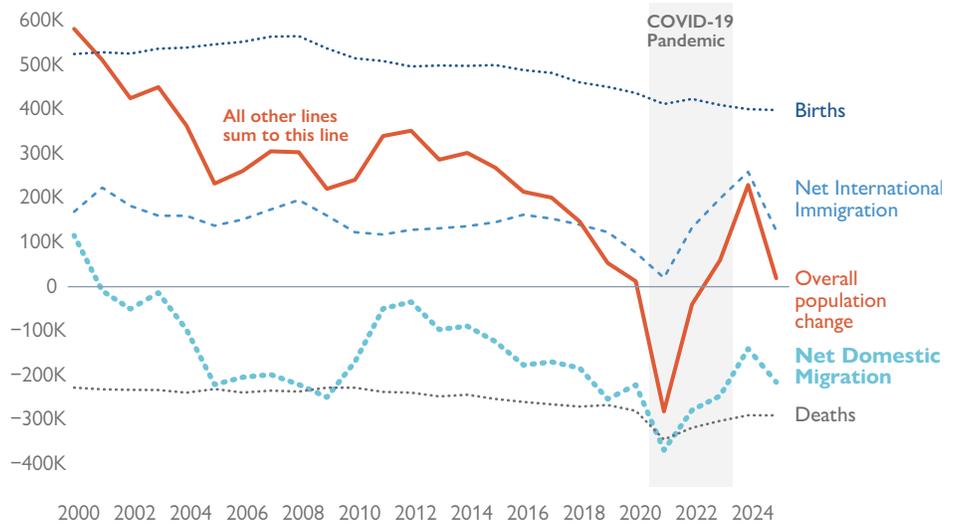
Source: CPL analysis of Department of Finance, Table E-2

A persistent gap between exits and entrances

For more than two decades, the number of people leaving California for other states has eclipsed the number arriving. Figure 13 shows that, in the lead-up to the COVID-19 pandemic, exits increased as entrances stayed flat, leading to a growing gap. In those years, around 15% more people left California each quarter than arrived.

FIGURE 13. California quarterly entrances and exits
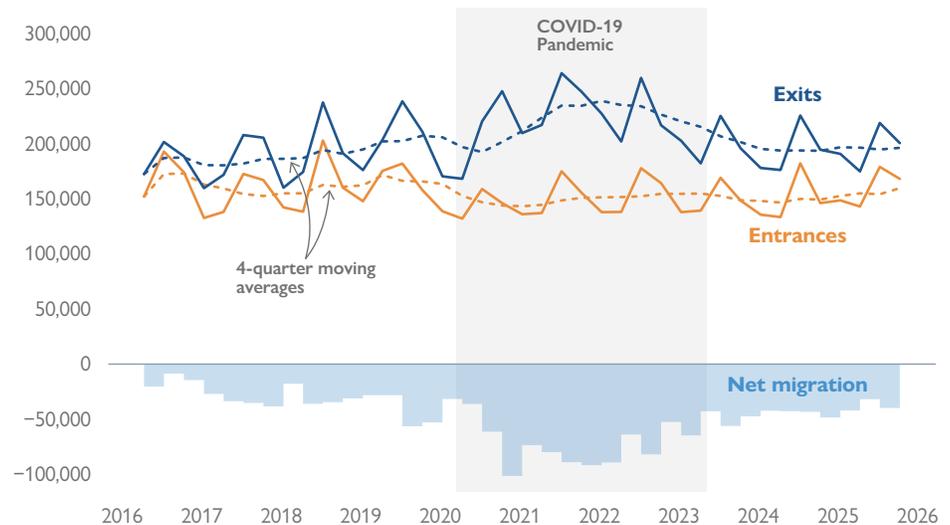
Note: The data include individuals in the UC-CCP with credit history, so volumes will differ from Census and California Department of Finance estimates. We do not observe people moving into or out of the state from outside the US.

Source: California Policy Lab analysis of University of California Consumer Credit Panel (UC-CCP) data.

When the pandemic began in 2020, exits spiked while arrivals dipped slightly. As a result, the gap between the number of people leaving and the number arriving more than doubled, reaching its peak in the final quarter of 2020. In that quarter, exits exceeded entrances by 60%, meaning that 101,000 more people left California than entered.[15]

Since the pandemic ended, the gap between exits and entrances has shrunk considerably, but it has not disappeared. **During 2025, nearly 150,000 more people left the state than arrived**. Entrances and exits no longer exhibit the intense volatility that they did during the pandemic, signaling that net migration to the state may be settling into a new normal.

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15 The numbers here and below come from the UC-CCP and may not match the absolute levels from Census or California Department of Finance data, though all three data sources show similar trends. This discrepancy stems from the fact that the UC-CCP includes only Californians with a credit record, which describes around 90% of all adults.

Californians are moving closer and less often

Overall rates of relocation for Californians have declined in recent years. Move rates fell by 10% (or 0.33 percentage points) during the pandemic and have stayed low (Figure 14). This mirrors a similar drop nationwide. Small changes in the rate translate into large numbers of people: a 0.1 percentage-point decline reflects about 26,000 fewer moves each quarter. As a result, roughly 343,000 fewer Californians are now moving each year compared to before the pandemic.

FIGURE 14. Average quarterly move rate in California

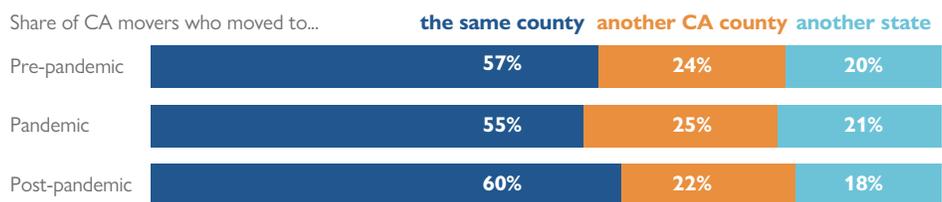|	
Pre-pandemic	3.42%
Pandemic	3.07%
Post-pandemic	3.09%

Note: The data describe the share of people who moved across neighborhoods (Census tracts) in the average quarter during each period. The data include individuals in the UC-CCP with a credit history. Only domestic, not international, moves are reflected. The "pre-pandemic" period spans 2016–19, "pandemic" spans 2020–22, and "post-pandemic" spans 2023–25.

Source: California Policy Lab analysis of University of California Consumer Credit Panel (UC-CCP) data.

Most Californians who move do not go far (Figure 15). About three in five remain within their original county, and since 2016, more than half have moved 10 miles or less.[16] Even after accounting for long-distance moves, the typical move has shortened. After the pandemic, the average distance was 358 miles — 14% less than the pre-pandemic average of 416 miles.

FIGURE 15. Destinations of California movers

Share of CA movers who moved to...	the same county	another CA county	another state
Pre-pandemic	57%	24%	20%
Pandemic	55%	25%	21%
Post-pandemic	60%	22%	18%

Note: The data include individuals with a credit history and reported Census geography who moved across neighborhoods (Census tracts). The "pre-pandemic" period spans 2016–19, "pandemic" spans 2020–22, and "post-pandemic" spans 2023–25.
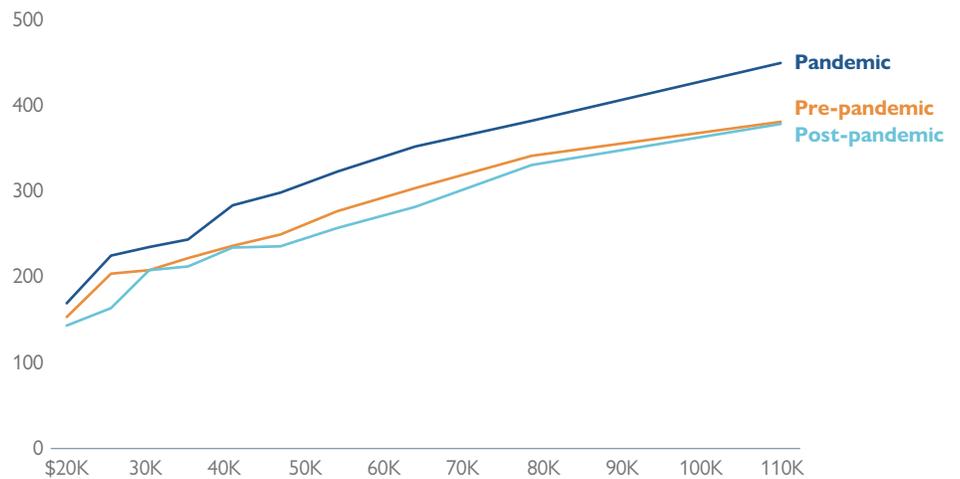
Source: California Policy Lab Analysis of University of California Consumer Credit Panel (UC-CCP) data.

16 We estimate the distance that a person moved as the distance between the population-weighted geographic centers of their old and new Census tracts. That is, we measure move distance "as the crow flies," rather than in terms of actual distance one would have to travel by road, for example.

At the same time, more affluent movers tend to move farther. Figure 16 shows a consistent upward relationship between move distance and the per-capita income of a mover's origin neighborhood. During the pandemic, the average mover from the highest-income California neighborhoods relocated 449 miles away — two and a half times as far as the average mover from the lowest-income neighborhoods.

FIGURE 16. Move distance increases with income

Average move distance (miles) by neighborhood per-capita income

Note: The chart shows the average distance moved by the per-capita income of the original neighborhood (Census tract) among Californians who move across neighborhoods. Move distance is defined as the straight-line distance between population-weighted neighborhood centroids. The data include all movers with a credit record in the UC-CCP who have a reported Census tract. The "pre-pandemic" period spans 2016–19, "pandemic" spans 2020–22, and "post-pandemic" spans 2023–25.

Source: California Policy Lab analysis of University of California Consumer Credit Panel (UC-CCP) and American Community Survey (ACS) data.

Conclusion

California's high cost of living is shaping who stays, who leaves, and who comes to the Golden State. Our analysis shows that many Californians who move out of state relocate to significantly more affordable communities and often see higher rates of homeownership. At the same time, those leaving are not typically from the state's poorest communities. Instead, many come from relatively affluent neighborhoods but appear financially weaker than their neighbors.

When Californians leave, they favor nearby states like Nevada and Idaho in the greatest numbers on a per capita basis. During the pandemic, those leaving California favored less densely populated states like Wyoming, but many of those trends have subsided.

Migration patterns have now settled into a post-pandemic normal where entrances continue to be outnumbered by exits. That ongoing gap suggests that policymakers should focus on restoring California's appeal to both current residents and to potential newcomers. Although policymakers have recently been focusing on making California more affordable, it is reasonable to expect these migration trends to persist until those efforts yield concrete reductions in the costs of living.

Acknowledgments

About the Data: The University of California Consumer Credit Panel (UC-CCP) is a dataset of anonymized consumer credit information, created for the purpose of studying consumer financial well-being and identifying trends among California households related to credit, debt, income, and mobility, including through the California Credit Dashboard. The data are currently in use for dozens of projects that inform research on a variety of topics including economic mobility, health and financial well-being, the impact of student debt, California's housing challenges, and more.