

Population Density & Change



Geographer's Notebook

California is a big state. It is the third largest of the United States, after Alaska and Texas. at 163,696 square miles. One square mile equals over 27.8 million square feet. How many square feet is your classroom?

California has a lot of people. It is the state with the largest population. The 2020 Census counted over 39 million people living in the state. That's one out of every ten Americans that lives in California. As a comparison, the state of Alaska, which is three times as large, had less than 1 million people living there in 2020.



So how crowded is it? It depends where you are. California has a population density of 258 people per square mile. That seems crowded compared to Alaska's 1.3 people per square mile. But it is nothing compared to New Jersey's 1,283.

People are never spread out evenly, though. In any state, you can find cities where lots of people are living very close together. You can also find areas of countryside where only a few people live in homes that are spread far apart.

Check the atlas glossary on page 49 (inside back cover) to get definitions for these terms.

Rural

Urban

Use the map on page 42 to compare differences in population density across the state.

List 3 of the most rural counties

List 3 of the most urban counties

Hint: Refer to map on page 27 for county names

Describe your county. Where are high population densities found? Where are very low population densities found?

Population Density & Change (cont.)



Examine the maps on page 43 showing how population density changed over time.

In 1860, was the population more concentrated in the northern or southern part of the state?

Why is it difficult to directly compare the map for 1860 to the series of maps for 1920 through 2017?

What county had the highest density in every decade from 1920-2010?

Some counties in California have not reached a population density of 10 people per square mile.

Can you describe the geographic pattern of where these counties are located and explain why the populations there did not grow like in other parts of the state?

Construct a bar graph using the following data on California population change over time.

Year	Population
1850	92,597
1890	1,213,398
1940	6,907,387
1980	23,667,764
2020	39,538,254

