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Where are Latinos Experiencing the Most Housing Insecurity in California?

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Issue

California faces a pressing housing crisis marked by soaring rents, limited affordable housing, and rising homelessness. Latinos, in particular, bear a disproportionate burden of housing insecurity, which includes homelessness, living in temporary lodging, overcrowded, doubled-up quarters, or substandard housing.

Studies have found that housing instability significantly increases one's risk of homelessness. In times of crisis, many households turn to precarious housing strategies — from seeking shelter in low-budget motels/hotels to doubling up, the practice of sharing housing due to economic hardship or housing loss — that can be precursors to homelessness.

A comprehensive strategy must therefore support housing insecurity today to mitigate homelessness in the future. Quantifying housing insecurity can have significant implications on the government's perception of the severity of the issue and the resources needed to address it. However, federal and state agencies lack comprehensive data on housing insecurity. Contextualizing homelessness within this larger paradigm brings to light the inequitable impact of housing insecurity.¹ Studies show that Latinos are consistently underrepresented among those experiencing homelessness in the United States but they have a much higher risk of doubling up compared to other racial/ethnic groups.²

Study Approach

To better quantify housing insecurity, this analysis introduces a housing insecurity metric, which relies on the Census Bureau's 5-year 2021 American Community Survey and California Department of Education's 2023 Student Homeless Counts to provide estimates by race/ethnicity on the total counts and rates of housing insecurity in the state.

The student data serve as a foundation for the housing insecurity metric, and estimates regarding doubling up are used to scale student homelessness counts up to total housing insecurity estimates (which incorporate youth and adult counts).

Additionally, qualitative data from literature reviews and semi-structured interviews provide deeper insights into the factors of and solutions for housing insecurity. Eleven interviews were held with key staff in homelessness services to gain insight into Latino housing insecurity and its manifestations across California.

Key Findings

- » About four in 100 California residents are likely experiencing housing insecurity, equating to an estimated 1.3 million housing insecure individuals in 2022. This estimate is over 1.5 times larger than the number of estimated individuals in doubled up housing situations in 2021 (820,961) and nearly 8 times greater than the number of people identified as homeless in 2022 (171,521).
- » Latinos are disproportionately overrepresented among California's housing insecure population, comprising 68% of this group while making up only about 39.5% of the state's population. No other racial/ethnic group analyzed exhibits similar rates of overrepresentation in housing insecurity. White residents, who are the second largest racial/ethnic group in the state at 35.8% of the population, account for only 14.1% of the housing insecure.
- » Southern California is home to most of the state's housing insecure individuals. Over 55% of all housing insecure individuals (760,006 out of 1,363,958) live in Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, San Diego, and San Bernardino counties. Latinos make up 71.8% of the housing insecure population across these counties (Figure 1).

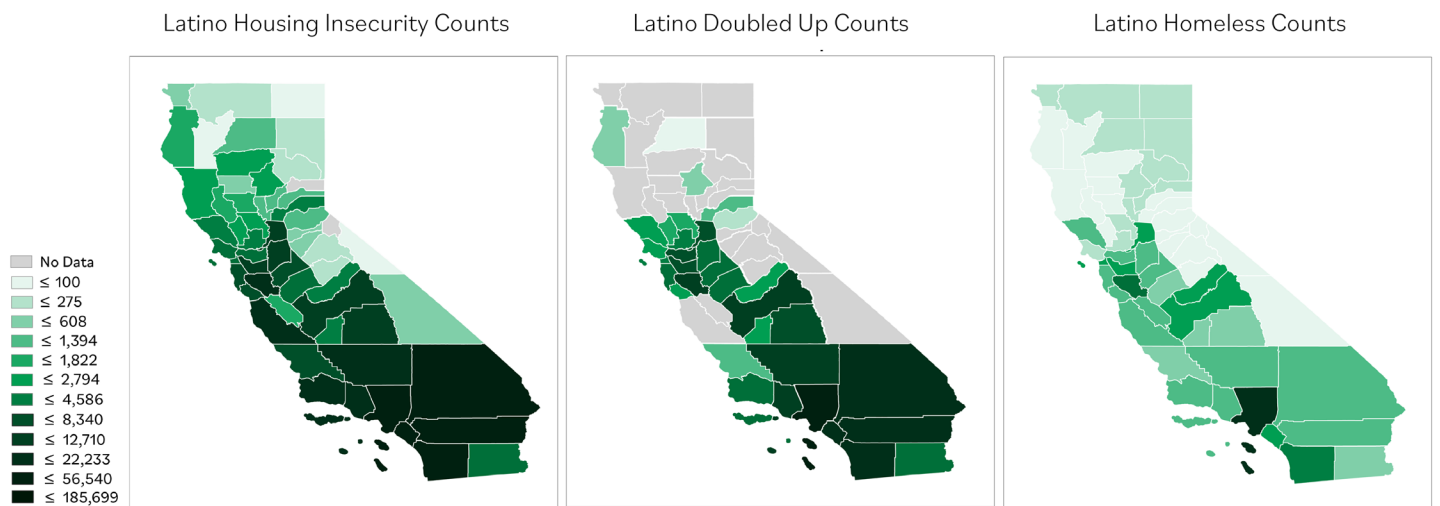


Figure 1.

Geographic breakdown of counts of Latino Housing insecurity, doubled up and homelessness across California Counties

Source: Author’s analysis of CDE DataQuest Portal; 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates; and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Note: No Housing Insecurity estimates were available for Alpine County. Additionally, no doubled up estimates could not be calculated for Amador, Calaveras, Colusa, Del Norte, Glenn, Inyo, Lake, Lassen, Mariposa, Mendocino, Modoc, Mono, Monterey, Nevada, Plumas, San Benito, Sierra, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, and Tuolumne due to sample size issues. Additionally, Latino Homelessness Counts were also combined for select counties due to a lack of available county-level data.

» Latinos have the highest prevalence of housing insecurity along the central coast. For instance, 20.8% of Latinos in Santa Barbara identified as housing insecure, followed by 20.6% in Monterey, and 18.3% in San Luis Obispo in 2022. In other words, about two in 10 Latinos in these counties are housing insecure. In comparison, about six in every 100 Latinos are experiencing housing insecurity across the state.

Recommendations

Ultimately, this analysis underscores the imperative of broadening the conceptualization of homelessness support to encompass a spectrum of services for those experiencing housing insecurity. By adopting the inclusive framework of housing insecurity, policymakers and stakeholders can develop tailored interventions, including but not limited to:

- » **Increasing Affordable Housing:** Expansion of affordable housing developments to meet growing demand and mitigate rising rental costs.
- » **Enhancing Transportation Services:** Improve public transportation systems to connect individuals with job opportunities and essential services.

- » **Expanding Immigration Support:** Develop targeted support programs for undocumented individuals to overcome barriers to housing stability.

Additional comparative and longitudinal data analysis is needed to help better contextualize Latino housing insecurity compared to other racial/ethnic groups. Additionally, more qualitative case studies may help lawmakers ensure that their strategies are tailored to meet the needs of those experiencing housing insecurity in California.

More Information

Carmona, G. N. (2024). Unveiling Latino Housing Insecurity in California (Master’s capstone, UCLA). Retrieved from: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9jh257j5>

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2. Richard, M., Dworkin, J., Rule, K., Farooqui, S., Glendening Z., and Carlson, S. (2020). “Quantifying Doubled-Up Homelessness: Presenting a New Measure Using U.S. Census Microdata, *Housing Policy Debate*, 1 - 22. Retrieved from: <https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Quantifying-Doubled-Up-Homelessness.pdf>