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## More than half of California children Latino, census shows

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More than half the children in California are Latinos, according to new census statistics that show the nation's most populous state rapidly approaching the day when Hispanics overtake whites as the largest minority.

Barely one in four Californians under age 18 are non-Hispanic whites, who declined in number along with black children as the number of Asian American and Hispanic children soared. Because of differing birth rates and migration patterns, the total number of children remained relatively stagnant.

The overall population grew to more than 37 million, dwarfing the nation's second-largest state, Texas, by 12 million people.

Among Californians of all ages, the 38 percent who are Hispanic almost equal the 40 percent who are white, a drop of 5 percent. Even in Orange County, where the airport is named after John Wayne, whites are now a minority and Hispanics make up the largest block of school-age children.

"Hispanics are the future of California," said William Frey, a demographer with the Brookings Institution. "Any local or state initiatives that have to do with education need to reach out to this population. That's more crucial in California than anywhere else."

The census statistics released Tuesday suggest the Golden State is losing its luster as growth has slowed and many of its residents have decamped for states where housing is cheaper. But it remains a harbinger of trends that have broad implications across the nation.

Analysts in California offered this caveat about the new census figures: Past census numbers came at times of relative or robust growth in the state economy. This time they were taken during one of the worst recessions in the state's history. Growth essentially stopped in the final two years of the decade.

"The period in the 1950s and '60s, when people expected you could move to California and get a good job and stay many generations, is clearly past us," said John Logan, a Brown University sociologist. Hispanics and Asians are now leaving California for other places in the country.

The rapid expansion in California's Hispanic population has transformed the state's political balance, putting Republicans at a disadvantage in statewide elections.

As recently as 1990, Hispanics were 26 percent of the state's overall population. By the next census in 2000, non-Hispanic whites had already become a minority. As the number of Hispanics has grown, so has their share of the electorate, reaching 22 percent last November.

That helped California Democrats hold back the national tide that swept Republicans into office. In California, Democrats won every major statewide office. "We looked nothing like the rest of the nation," said Thad Kousser, a political scientist at the University of California at San Diego. "We were a political island."

Dan Schnur, director of the Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics at the University of Southern California, said Republicans face continued problems.

"The 2010 election is a very accurate foreshadowing of the impact of the Latino vote in statewide elections, unless Republicans figure out a different way to deal with this," he said.

The state's population has shifted away from the coast toward inland California, presenting a geographic challenge for Democrats and a demographic challenge to Republicans. The next delegations are expected to include more minorities to reflect the growing diversity of the state.

As congressional and legislative boundaries are redrawn, the new population figures mean white urban Democrats are likely to be at risk. At the same time, generally safe Republican districts in some of those inland areas could be more Democratic as a result of some of the population changes.

For the first time since it achieved statehood, California will not gain even a single congressional seat as a result of the census. In contrast, Texas, with a population of 25 million, will pick up four new House seats.

California's population grew 10 percent between 2000 and 2010, making it one of the two slowest-growing states in the West.

"It's no longer a boom state. It's a steady state," said Dowell Myers, a professor in the School of Policy, Planning and Development at the University of Southern California. "It means there is more hope for us digging ourselves out of our hole."

Whatever the future, it is certain to include more Hispanics. More than nine out of 10 Latinos under age 18 are U.S. citizens, according to the National Council of La Raza, and the median age of Hispanics is just 27.

"From a political perspective, any party that wants to be a majority party in the future is going to have to have a significant share of that population," said Arturo Vargas, executive director of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials.

*Staff researcher Dan Keating contributed to this report.*