



THE CURRENT STATE OF RENTING

Growing Housing Pressure Among Asian American Renters in Los Angeles and Orange Counties



Introduction

Due to rising housing costs, healthcare expenses, and inflation, households are currently confronted by high costs of living and high levels of economic insecurity.¹ The cost of living in Los Angeles and Orange Counties is higher than the national average, culminating with rising rents and other housing-related costs, putting extra strain on families already grappling with expensive everyday necessities. As of May 2025, Orange County is the fourth most expensive urban area, followed by Los Angeles in the eighth position, according to the Council of Community and Economic Research's cost of living index which compares differences in costs for everyday goods and services among regions.^{2,i} Asian American communities in Los Angeles and Orange Counties—which comprise a population of over 2 million and among the nation's largest—face growing socioeconomic burdens, including housing affordability challenges.³

Contrary to the “model minority myth” which misleadingly suggests that Asian Americans are universally socioeconomically successful, many Asian Americans face distinct housing struggles ranging from severe housing cost burdens, overcrowded living conditions, barriers linked to language access and immigration status, and scarcity of affordable housing options.⁴ There are stark differences among Asian ethnic groups when looking at socioeconomic indicators such as income, percentages of households that are cost-burdened, and rates of homeownership.^{5,6} Developing equitable economic and housing policies are necessary to address the housing challenges and housing disparities in Los Angeles and Orange Counties.

High Housing Costs for Renters

In recent years, housing costs have surged, with both rent and mortgage prices climbing rapidly. High rents are more generally more pronounced in Los Angeles and Orange Counties than in most other regions of the U.S. In 2024, average rents in Los Angeles and Orange Counties were \$2,269 and \$2,653, respectively; and by 2026, these figures are projected to rise to \$2,334 and \$2,786.⁷ Large proportions of Asian Americans in Los Angeles and Orange Counties rent their homes. Specifically, 54% of Los Angeles county households are renters and 46% of Asian Americans households in the region are. Meanwhile in Orange county, 43% of all households and over 38% of Asian Americans households rent.⁸

ⁱ Council of Community and Economic Research's cost of living index is a comparison between the costs of everyday foods and services among differing metropolitan regions focusing on the spending patterns of higher-income professional households.

High and Severely High Housing Cost-Burden

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines a household as having a *high housing cost-burden* when 30% or more of the household income is spent on housing expenses.⁹ In Los Angeles and Orange Counties, more than 57% and 56% of renter households, respectively, are housing cost-burdened, exceeding the national average rate of 49%.¹⁰ In Los Angeles County, 53% of Asian American renters are high housing cost-burdened, while 56% of Asian American renters in Orange County are.¹¹

Households paying more than 50% of their income on housing—classified as *severely housing cost-burdened*—are becoming more common given rising economic pressures and the rising costs of housing. About 30% of renters in Los Angeles and Orange counties are severely housing cost-burdened.^{12,13} The overall burden Asian Americans in Los Angeles and Orange Counties face is also high with over 28% and 31% of Asian American renters in these respective counties being severely housing cost-burdened.¹⁴

Aggregate figures mask disparities among Asian ethnic subgroups and disaggregated data are necessary to identify which Asian American communities face the greatest challenges. This burden is particularly acute for certain groups; for instance, 72% of Cambodian Americans in Orange County are housing cost-burdened, significantly higher than the 56% average among Asian Americans overall.¹⁵ Without disaggregated data, the housing burdens experienced by specific communities remain overlooked, reinforcing inequities and masking needed targeted interventions.

The map in Figure 1 represents the percentage of renter households that are housing cost-burdened in census tracts where at least 40% of the population is Asian American. Across both counties, Asian American communities are housing-cost burdened. This is especially pronounced in the cities of Garden Grove, large parts of the San Gabriel Valley, and in Asian ethnic enclaves, such as Koreatown and Chinatown.

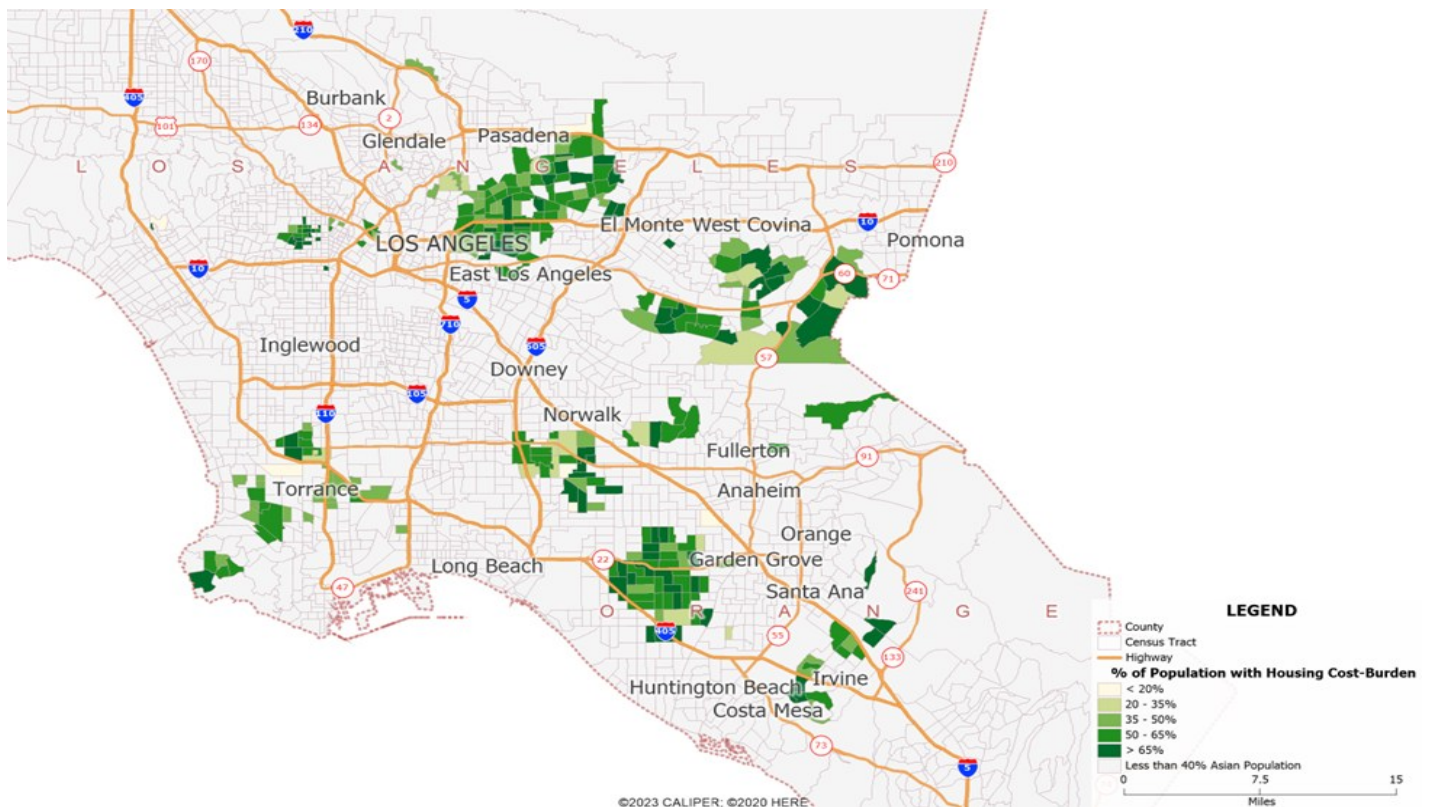


Figure 1: Cost-burdened (>30%) Households in areas with greater than 40% Asian population in Los Angeles and Orange Counties at the Census Tract Level

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B25070: Gross Rent as a Percentage of Household Income in the Past 12 Months & 2020 Decennial Census Demographic and Housing Characteristics, Table P5 & P6: Race

High housing costs can contribute to overcrowded living conditions, intergenerational housing instability, and heightened vulnerability to displacement, particularly among lower-income, limited English proficient, and immigrant community members.¹⁶

Case Study: Garden Grove & Westminster

The neighboring cities of Garden Grove and Westminster in Orange County offer a distinct perspective on the intersection of housing dynamics and demographic composition. The Asian American population in Garden Grove is approximately 76,000 or roughly 44% of the city's residents. Westminster has over 48,000 Asian Americans, 53% of its residents. Asian Americans comprise the largest racial group in both cities.^{17,18} Little Saigon, parts of which are located within Garden Grove and Westminster, is recognized as one of the largest Vietnamese enclaves in the United States, with 46% of the population of identifying as Vietnamese.¹⁹

Housing costs in these areas have risen to levels that place substantial pressure on households, especially those in low- and middle-income brackets. The me-

dian gross rent in Garden Grove and Westminster in 2024 was \$2,184 and \$2,159, respectively, while the national average was just below \$1,487.²⁰ Between 2021 and 2024, the median gross rent in Garden Grove rose from about \$1,809 to \$2,184—an increase of nearly 21%—while Westminster saw a 20% jump from \$1,798 to \$2,159.²¹ Over the 10-year span between 2014 and 2024, median gross rents in both cities grew by more than 60%, outpacing the rental growth rate of Orange County overall.²²

The sharp increase in rental costs reflects broader affordability challenges across Orange County's competitive housing market. Due to the demographics in Garden Grove and Westminster, much of the increased costs will be felt by the large Asian American community residing in these geographies. The rapid increase in housing costs underscores the growing difficulty many community members face in securing stable, affordable housing in this predominantly immigrant and working-class community.²³

The Intersection of Housing Affordability and Environmental Justice

In May 2026, over 50,000 residents were evacuated in Garden Grove and surrounding areas after a damaged storage tank containing methyl methacrylate, a highly toxic chemical, was discovered at GKN Aerospace.^a While emergency crews contained the immediate danger, the incident highlights how environmental hazards often disproportionately affect lower-income communities, where housing affordability and environmental justice are closely intertwined.^b

Consistent with broader patterns across Southern California, Orange County's rapid urbanization occurred alongside industrial development, resulting in neighborhoods located near facilities that store and process hazardous materials.^{c,d} In Garden Grove, residential growth expanded alongside long-established industrial corridors.^e The city's Asian American population grew substantially between 2000 and 2020, increasing from just over 50,000 to about 76,000 residents—a nearly 52% increase.^f Consequently, many Asian American households now live near industrial facilities, including GKN Aerospace. The environmental justice field has long documented how low-income and minority communities are disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards, with these disparities persisting as housing affordability limits opportunities to relocate away from hazardous environmental areas.^g

The evacuation disrupted daily life, displaced families, interrupted local businesses, and created uncertainty about immediate and long-term health and environmental impacts. Such emergencies can impose greater hardships on economically vulnerable households, whose limited financial resources, transportation options, and housing choices reduce their ability to respond to or recover from environmental hazards.^h This incident illustrates how environmental hazards can reinforce existing economic and housing inequities, underscoring the need for policies that expand access to safe, affordable housing.

Table 1: Housing Cost-Burdened Rates of Renters in Garden Grove, Westminster, and other Select Orange County Cities

CITY/COUNTY	TOTAL POPULATION		ASIAN AMERICANS	
	% cost-burdened	% severely cost-burdened	% cost –burdened	% severely cost-burdened
Garden Grove	58.5%	31.1%	60.7%	34.4%
Westminster	65.0%	41.3%	65.4%	44.5%
Huntington Beach	50.7%	25.6%	48.2%	26.7%
Irvine	51.9%	27.7%	50.2%	26.3%
Newport Beach	48.2%	24.9%	49.3%	37.1%
Orange County	55.7%	28.7%	55.5%	30.6%

U.S. Census Bureau.2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B25070: Gross Rent as a Percentage of Household Income in the Past 12 Months [Data set].

Table 1 presents the high housing cost-burdened and severely housing cost-burdened rates of renters in Orange County and selected cities.

Renter households in Garden Grove and Westminster experience the highest housing cost burdens among the cities shown, with about 60% of households high cost-burdened and roughly 34% severely cost-burdened—rates higher than those in Irvine, Huntington Beach, and Newport Beach. These disparities are especially pronounced among Asian American renters, as more than 34% in Garden Grove and nearly 45% in Westminster are severely cost-burdened. While Asian Americans in other Orange County cities with large Asian populations, such as Irvine, also face affordability challenges, their rates remain lower. Overall, these patterns highlight a divide in Orange County’s housing landscape, with renters in Garden Grove and Westminster facing greater housing insecurity. These patterns are further highlighted when data are disaggregated, with Vietnamese households in Garden Grove (63.8%) and Westminster (66.7%) experiencing disproportionately high cost-burden rates.²⁴



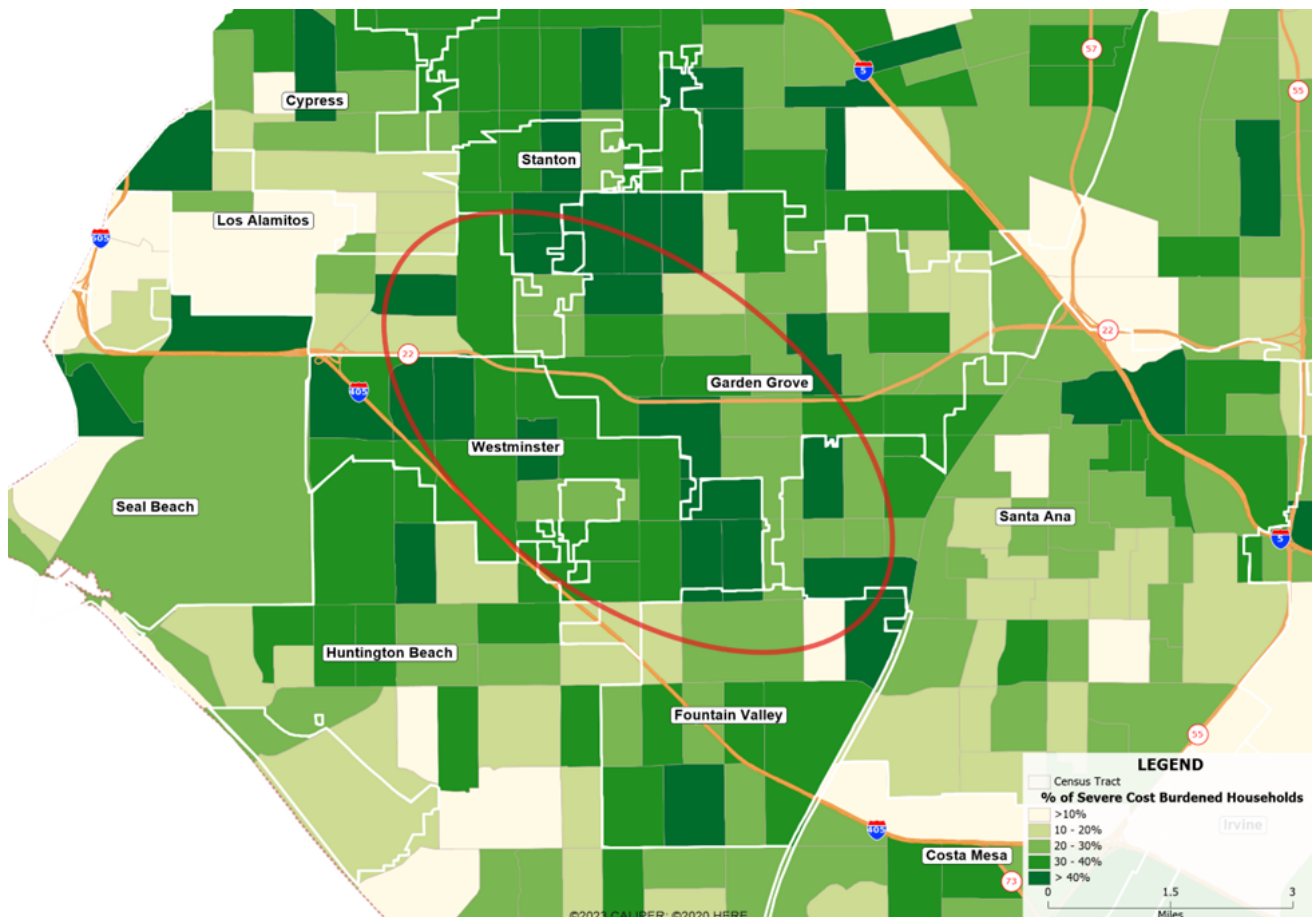


Figure 2: Map of percent severely housing cost-burdened renter households (> 50% of Income) in Garden Grove and Westminster and Neighboring Cities at Census Tract Level

Data from U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B25070: Gross Rent as a Percentage of Household Income in the Past 12 Months [Data set].

Figure 2 shows the percentages of renter households that are severely housing cost-burdened in census tracts in Westminster and Garden Grove. The darker the color, the higher the rate of severe housing cost-burdened households in the tract. A majority of the census tracts show that over 30% of households are severely cost-burdened. This is especially pronounced near the borders of Westminster and Garden Grove, highlighted by the red oval. Households in these tracts exhibit a higher rate of severe housing cost-burden, placing them in the highest percentage groups in the area. Garden Grove and Westminster comparatively have a larger number of census tracts that exhibit a severe housing cost-burden than surrounding cities, such as Santa Ana or Los Alamitos.

Alleviating Housing Cost Burdens in Los Angeles and Orange Counties

Policy interventions can be effective in reducing housing cost burdens when equitably implemented. Housing assistance programs, such as the Housing Choice Vouchers, have been effective in helping severely cost-burdened households and providing housing stability for economically precarious households.²⁵ Other policy interventions such as rent control efforts have shown to reduce economic burden and enhance housing stability for tenants by limiting rent increases and lowering displacement risk.²⁶

Asian Americans are often overlooked in housing policies due to aggregated racial data and the persistence of the model minority myth, which mask housing insecurity among Asian Americans. The lack of visibility limits the development of housing policies that are responsive to the challenges of underserved

Asian American communities. Additionally, even when they qualify, many Asian Americans face barriers to access due to the lack of awareness of available housing assistance programs and tenant protections. This is often due to materials not being made available in-language and a lack of outreach to Asian American communities.^{27,28}

Addressing housing challenges requires equity-driven policies paired with community-tailored approaches, such as language-accessible outreach and culturally competent services, to ensure Asian American households can benefit from housing policies. Culturally competent services include housing counseling, which involves explaining housing policies in culturally and linguistically familiar ways. Housing counseling has helped address language barriers, limited awareness of housing assistance programs, and low participation in available housing resources by improving understanding of available resources and increasing program participation among Asian American communities.²⁹ Programs such as these highlight the importance of integrating culturally responsive approaches into housing policy and service delivery to better support underserved Asian American households.

Conclusion

While rising housing costs in Garden Grove and Westminster have specific implications for their Asian American residents, the trends in these cities reflect a wider affordability crisis affecting much of Southern California and nationwide. Rising housing costs exacerbate displacement risks, inter-generational strain, and housing instability for communities. Elevated housing affordability challenges suggest that many households, including Asian American households, may be forced to make difficult choices between enduring financial hardship to remain in their communities and relocating to more affordable areas.³⁰ Effective responses must require equity-centered housing policies that pair affordability tools with community specific solutions to ensure housing strategies effectively reach and reduce cost burdens for households.

Asian Americans Advancing Justice Southern California (AJSOCAL) is a social justice organization that protects and strengthens the rights and dignity of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities, especially those that are most disadvantaged. AJSOCAL's Demographic Research Project promotes a better understanding of AAPI communities by making data on AAPIs more accessible through research, technical assistance, and training. To learn more about AJSOCAL's research, please visit: <https://ajsocal.org/our-reports-and-research/>

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