



WORLD CITIZENSHIP MINI-SERIES

Spotlight region: California, USA



WHY CALIFORNIA EMBODIES AMERICA'S STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES



The United States of America holds unmatched global influence and economic clout, respected and sometimes criticised for its commanding presence on the international stage. Within this vast nation, California stands out prominently—not only as America's most populous and economically powerful state but also as a unique representation of its broader strengths, challenges, and complexities.

This spotlight on California forms part of **CS Global Partners' World Citizenship Mini-Series**, a collection of insightful analyses examining key regions through the lens of citizenship quality and appeal, based on data from the 2024 World Citizenship Report. The World Citizenship Report rigorously evaluates 188 jurisdictions worldwide across five core motivators: Safety and Security, Economic Opportunity, Quality of Life, Global Mobility, and Financial Freedom. Each motivator receives a score out of 100, with the overall country ranking reflecting a weighted average of these key metrics.

CS Global Partners, founded in 2012 and headquartered in Mayfair, London, is a global leader in bespoke citizenship and residency solutions, advising both individuals and governments. Known for its innovative and ethical approach, the firm empowers clients to achieve economic stability, personal security, and global opportunities through trusted Citizenship by Investment programmes.

In this report, we specifically explore how California significantly influences America's overall standing, highlighting where the state excels and identifying areas where considerable improvement is needed. California is emblematic of American dynamism and contradictions: home to thriving tech hubs alongside deep economic inequality, a young and innovative workforce contending with severe housing shortages, and breathtaking natural landscapes threatened by frequent climate-driven disasters.

Through the findings in this mini-series, we seek to provide high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) and global citizens valuable insights into why California—and by extension, the United States—continues to attract, yet also challenges, individuals considering their future options for citizenship.



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA WORLD CITIZENSHIP RANKING

22

WORLD CITIZENSHIP REPORT RANKING



SAFETY AND SECURITY
MOTIVATOR RANKING

53



ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
MOTIVATOR RANKING

14



QUALITY OF LIFE
MOTIVATOR RANKING

29



GLOBAL MOBILITY
MOTIVATOR RANKING

8



FINANCIAL FREEDOM
MOTIVATOR RANKING

29

TOTAL NUMBER OF COUNTRIES RANKED 188

CS Global
partners

United States' Overall Rankings based on data from CS Global Partners' World Citizenship Report 2024

“AMERICA FIRST” NO LONGER? WHY THE US TOOK 22ND IN OUR REPORT



The United States of America is globally respected, feared, loved and hated for its immense power and influence. California contributes to its prestige.

America's huge economy, well-funded and highly skilled military and geographical heft make it a global superpower: perhaps the global superpower.

The CS Global Partners World Citizenship Mini-Series Report highlights the capability and strength of America but also underlines the drawbacks which have led some American HNWIs to leave the country. The report's data is derived from the **World Citizenship Index (WCI)**.

Ranked 22 out of the 188 countries studied in the WCI according to our report's headline rankings, we will explore how America could improve its standing, with a particular focus on California.

The methodology of the WCI combines **qualitative and quantitative research** to make sense of the deep, enduring quality of citizenship through the lens of the HNW investor.

Uniting our unparalleled work in the citizenship solutions industry with data taken from **188 jurisdictions**, we used the country data to evaluate five motivators of citizenship (Safety and Security, Economic Opportunity, Quality of Life, Global Mobility, and Financial Freedom).

We subsequently scored countries' citizenships out of 100 points for each motivator, with the overall ranking a weighted average of the motivators.

The WCI is a useful tool for individuals seeking to understand why countries inspire migration from, or to, their shores.

For high-net-worth Americans, the data from the WCI might paint both a familiar and surprising picture in demonstrating America's potential, and obstacles.

California, in particular, is a study in contrasts. It features **innovative tech hubs** in cities suffering **climate-induced natural disasters**; a **thriving economy rife with inequality**; and a vibrant and young population **facing the country's worst housing crisis**.



ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES: RAPID GROWTH WITH WORSENING INEQUALITY

America possesses the **world's largest economy**, with a \$26.88 trillion GDP in 2024. California alone **comprises approximately 15 per cent of the country's overall GDP**, with a GDP of \$4.08 trillion in 2024. This is an out-sized proportion of American GDP, given that there are 50 different states comprising the United States.

The United States took the ranking of 14 in the World Citizenship Index **"Economic Opportunity"** pillar, which positions it near the top of countries for economic potential, though not within the top ten.

California is a particularly strong contributor to this ranking. The country has a high **median household income of \$90,901**, and a high ratio of HNWIs which has grown in recent years. According to the Internal Revenue Service, the percentage of American taxpayers with incomes of \$1 million or above in California increased from 17.1 per cent to 17.9 per cent between 2019 and 2021.

The decentralisation of the United States means that individual states can set their own tax policies, which means that economic opportunities can vary wildly depending on the state. **California sets the country's highest income tax rate and highest sales tax rate.**

While the income tax rate is progressive, meaning that it rises depending upon income level, the sales tax rate is not.

The state's income tax rate is particularly striking when considering that nine states (Alaska, Florida, Nevada, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, and Wyoming) levy no state income tax at all. **California's high taxes do not do America's ranking of 29 in Financial Freedom any favours.**

An economic liability for the United States is its ageing population. At a median age of 38.8 years, its average age is not as striking as its European counterparts but substantially higher than the youthful populations of many countries within Africa and the Middle East.

California's average age of 37.3 puts it among the more youthful states in the country, which is useful for the state's technological hubs in cities such as San Francisco, San Jose, and Sacramento. Silicon Valley companies are eager to attract talent from across the country (and indeed, across the globe) to the state, offering competitive salaries and exciting opportunities for career progression. The tech hubs enjoy the fruits of California's excellent, **top-tier universities.**

However, these tech hubs contribute to another economic liability of the state: inequality. The high salaries, rapid employee turnover and increasing gentrification of the state's urban centres has driven out many poorer Californians, contributing to urban ills such as homelessness, cost of living, and unemployment.

California has the highest homelessness rate in America, with [almost 30 per cent of the entire country's homeless population residing in California.](#)

The state's massive economic inequality and soaring living costs (including rent, food, and transport) have made housing difficult to attain for millions of Californians. Homelessness, a problem with which California has struggled for decades, became worse during and after the COVID-19 pandemic layoffs.

Almost a third of Californians live in poverty or near-poverty, and housing is scarce. As reported by US News and World Report, 'California has built roughly 800,000 new housing units since 2015 but **still needs 3.5 million more homes to accommodate the current population.**'

Housing is often unaffordable in California, even when it is available. The rural parts of the state are considered more budget-friendly than other parts of California, but they are still extremely expensive (especially when compared to the rest of the country). US News and World Report explains that for most American real estate decisions, 'the conventional wisdom is that an affordable home is around 2.6 times the household income'; yet, even in the cheapest part of California, 'the median cost of a single-family home is over four times that in even the cheaper metros in the state, and nearly 10 times greater in the more expensive areas.'

Housing is just one aspect of California's high cost of living. Another contributing factor is **transportation**. The state's large geographical area is useful for hosting a large population (despite the state's inability to house them) and providing resources to contribute to the state's

economy, but California's sprawling landmass means that transportation is more expensive, and commutes take longer.

Normally, Californians will need to utilise individual vehicles and even when public transportation is available, it tends to be expensive. San Francisco, for example, offers public transportation but at a high cost for riders.

Rounding out the state's economic issues is **unemployment**. California's unemployment rate was a full percentage point higher than the rest of the United States in 2024. This was partially due to a high incidence of **tech layoffs** by companies like [Google, Tesla, and Ebay](#) (set to continue into 2025, according to [TechCrunch](#)).

To remedy these problems, California needs to build more homes, perhaps by amending planning laws to do so more efficiently. To continue to attract top talent in tech, business, and financial services, the state should avoid raising the already high income and sales tax.

However, the state should also enact more effective policy to help the state's sizeable impoverished and homeless population, along with policies to help the unemployed. The state offers a large safety net and many social welfare programmes, but these programmes are obviously not reaching those who need them most.



SAFETY AND SECURITY: AN UNEVEN PHENOMENON

The United States' lowest ranking in the WCI data, by far, is **Safety and Security**.

Ranked **53 out of 188 countries**, America lags behind many other countries, including CBI jurisdictions St. Kitts and Nevis and Dominica. California presents a complex picture when it comes to safety.

A phenomenon that affects all Californians are the **natural disasters**, many of which have worsened due to **climate change**. The devastating Los Angeles wildfires, which began in January 2025, demolished the homes of wealthy and poor residents alike, leaving many people homeless and with few or no personal possessions.

The **wildfires** killed 27 people, and destroyed 15,467 structures, [Forbes](#) has reported. The fires have additionally caused \$250 billion and \$275 billion in damage to properties.

These wildfires are not exactly isolated incidents. California is particularly vulnerable to climate disaster events, which are incredibly costly.

According to the [National Centers for Environmental Information](#), 'From 1980–2024, there were **46 confirmed weather/climate disaster events with losses exceeding \$1 billion each to affect California**. These events included 14 drought events, six flooding events, three freeze events, four severe storm events, and 19 wildfire events.'

This statistic does not even count the myriad of drought, wildfire, freeze, flooding and severe storm events which cost less than \$1 billion.

Crime in California is heavily dependent on the area. Northern California tends to be safer than other parts of the state. However, as a

whole California is not among the safest states in the United States.

Crime Grade gives California a D- grade for safety and crime rates, noting that '**a crime occurs every 10 seconds (on average) in California.**'

Violent crime has been on the rise in the state over the past decade, despite falling throughout the early 2000s. Rates of some [property crimes](#) in California are strikingly high, such as auto mobile theft.

To improve safety, the state will need to **improve its disaster resilience responses** and deter violent and property crime. Though violent crime is an issue across the United States, the geography of California makes the state unique in its frontline vulnerability to the effects of climate change.



QUALITY OF LIFE: AN INCONSISTENT PICTURE

Quality of Life in California is something of a mixed bag. This is consistent with the United States' overall ranking in WCI data, of **29 out of 188 countries** (putting the country ahead of most countries in the world, while still trailing most countries in Europe and many in Asia).

Despite the **high life expectancy rate**, low rates of depression, and sunny weather, the state's environmental vulnerabilities and poor political participation diminish quality living in the state.

California's life expectancy is a **lofty 80.9 years**. [Factors](#) which influence this high life expectancy include residents' access to quality healthcare, low obesity rates, and consistently high rates of physical activity.

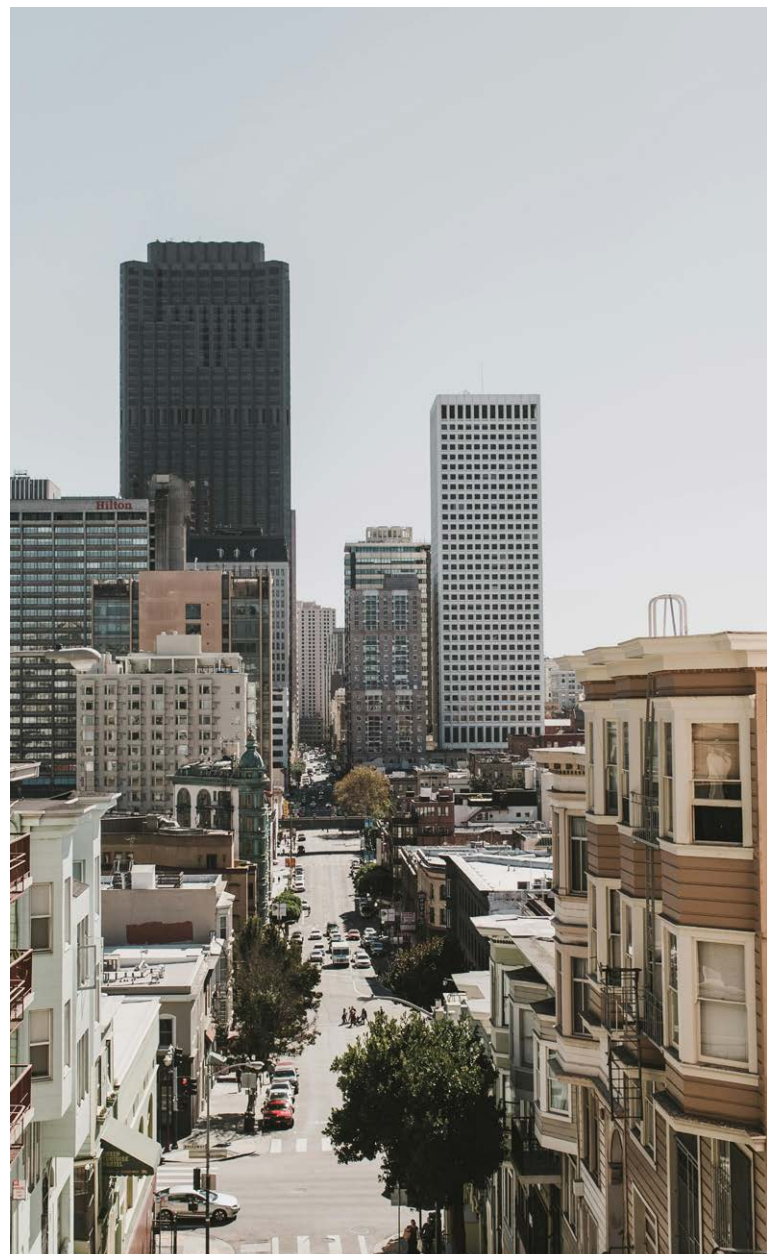
Residents are regularly ranked among the **happiest people in the country**. California has America's fourth-lowest adult depression rate. Wealthy and tech-savvy cities like San Francisco and San Jose, high-income levels, and the regular presence of sun all bode well for happy living.

The state's **weather** is regularly praised by residents and visitors, providing sun year-round. Californians are known for their love of beaches and are often thought to be laidback with amiable dispositions. The hot weather is not unbearable as the weather is cooled by a refreshing sea breeze.

The weather does pose great risks to quality living, however, as the heat and proximity to the sea make the state particularly vulnerable to climate-induced disasters. The recent wildfires are only one example of the many natural disasters (such as drought, wildfire, freeze, flooding and severe storm events) which leave the state vulnerable.

California's **low rates of political engagement**, especially compared to previous years, also decrease its living quality. In the 2024 election, Californian voter turnout [decreased by nearly 10 per cent](#) compared to 2020. Young Californian voters in particular feel increasingly disengaged from politics, a feeling which is only growing.

To improve quality living, California should pursue policies to engage young voters and protect against climate-induced disasters.



CALIFORNIA WITHIN THE US AND BEYOND

The ascendance of **Donald Trump**, a Republican, to the American presidency has **decreased the relative influence** and power of California, a progressive state.

Trump is [disdainful](#) of the state, arguing that Democrats have made California 'not liveable', describing Californian political and economic policies 'insane', and calling California Governor Gavin Newsom 'Gavin Newscum' for his handling of the California wildfires.

The influential policy document **Project 2025**, written by Trump allies but disavowed by Trump, also takes aim at California, especially the state's views on healthcare and abortion.

Despite the **loss of relative power** as it relates to presidential representation on the national level, California still has significant sway within the United States and beyond. During Trump's first term, according to the [University of California, Berkeley](#), California filed 122 lawsuits against the federal government, at a cost of about \$42 million', indicating the state's proclivity to be a powerful critic of the federal government.



In terms of **sheer population and economic clout**, California is easily the strongest state in the Union. If California were a country, [World Population Review](#) writes, 'it would have the fourth- or fifth-largest economy in the world.'

California is not afraid to go its own way on foreign affairs, too. The California Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz) notes that California has strong sway in international affairs dealings, especially due to the state's \$628 billion in exports and imports, large population, and large immigrant population (including a large highly-skilled immigrant population).

In 2024, **Foreign Direct Investment** supported a whopping 800,084 jobs in the state, and the state leads in two-way trade and agriculture exports, too. As GO-Biz explains, California 'leverages its leading position in the world to propel the economy forward'.

California's proclivity to pursue relations with other states to assert global leadership is not a new phenomenon. [Stanford University](#) notes that 'In 2017, [California] Gov. Jerry Brown met with China's President Xi Jinping to negotiate a joint partnership to reduce carbon emissions.'

Stanford adds that 'In 2013, well before the Trump administration, California began to connect its **cap-and-trade system** regulating how companies emit greenhouse gases to provinces in Canada. The result is a sub-federal system for regulating carbon that spans international borders.'



CONCLUSION

California is an **economically dynamic, tech-savvy and highly populated state**. It is among the most powerful states in the country, but faces setbacks related to **inequality and safety**.

The state also levies the **highest income and sales taxes in the United States**. The high income tax rate has especially impacted HNWIs (as the income tax is a progressive tax, increasing with income level).

Housing in the state has become largely unaffordable, contributing to the state's unfortunate status as having the **highest rate of homelessness in America**. The **high cost of living and poor transportation links** make living costs even more expensive in the state. Even the most affordable parts of California still demand very high salaries to get by.



The state's dominance within the tech industry is good for economic growth, but bad for reducing gentrification and unemployment. Tech companies, based in major Californian cities, have driven up prices in their surrounding areas. Additionally, the tech industry's massive layoffs in 2024 (set to continue in 2025) make even California's most lucrative field more insecure.

The state's vulnerability to **climate-induced disasters** and proclivity towards certain types of **crime** is balanced with the state's **happy population, sunny weather, and long-lived population**.

To **improve**, California needs to build up resilience to natural disasters, adopt policies to help fight inequality and crime, aid the unemployed and the homeless, and strengthen transportation links. California should also consider changing its tax policies to lose its reputation of being the most highly taxed state in America.

If these recommendations are adopted, California has the potential to strengthen its economic competitiveness and clout, improving its security and global standing in the process.



A SPOTLIGHT ON THE ST. KITTS AND NEVIS CITIZENSHIP BY INVESTMENT PROGRAMME



The First. The Finest. Pioneer of the global investor immigration industry since 1984.

St. Kitts and Nevis established its Citizenship by Investment Unit (CIU) in 1984, only one year after the country gained independence from Britain.

Even though the twin-island nation is the smallest country in the Caribbean, the islands are home to the most trustworthy and elite CBI Programme across the globe as a result of the CIU's commitment to keeping the Programme relevant and up to date with the needs of investors.

Recognised today as the premium and trusted investment solution, the St. Kitts and Nevis CBI Programme is an intelligent choice for discerning investors.

A trusted and strategic diversification strategy for your portfolio, the St. Kitts and Nevis CBI Programme implements strict due diligence processes in full compliance with national legislation and international standards.

Once an application is vetted, within 120 days of acknowledgement by the CIU of a CBI application, the CIU will issue a letter advising whether an application is:

- Approved-in-principle;
- Denied; or
- Delayed for cause and is still being processed.

Alongside the many advantages of living in St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Kitts and Nevis citizenship offers many benefits which include:

- Citizenship for life, with the right to live and work in the country
- The ability to pass on citizenship to future generations
- A fair tax regime, with no worldwide income, inheritance or gift tax for tax residents
- Global mobility

Citizenship by Investment in St. Kitts and Nevis is available through one of four options:

1. SUSTAINABLE ISLAND STATE CONTRIBUTION

The SISC was established with a view to facilitating economic development and social upliftment in St. Kitts and Nevis.

Main applicant or a family with up to four persons including: **US\$250,000**

- a) A main applicant with a spouse and up to two dependants; or
- b) A main applicant with up to three dependants

Each additional dependant under 18 **US\$25,000**

Each additional dependant aged 18 or above **US\$50,000**

2. DEVELOPER'S REAL ESTATE INVESTMENT OPTION

The minimum investment per applicant is **US\$325,000** (*resaleable after a 7-year minimum holding period*).

In addition to the minimum investment, real estate buyers should be aware of purchase costs (mainly compulsory insurance fund contributions and conveyancing fees).

3. PRIVATE REAL ESTATE SALE INVESTMENT OPTION

Applicants may apply for citizenship through the purchase of Approved Private Real Estate.

The minimum investment in a condominium unit or share in a real estate development designated as Approved Private Real Estate is **US\$325,000** (*resaleable after a 7-year minimum holding period*).

The minimum investment in a single-family private dwelling home designated as Approved Private Real Estate is **US\$600,000** (*resaleable after a 7-year minimum holding period*).

4. PUBLIC BENEFIT OPTION

Under the Public Benefit Option applicants can obtain citizenship by making a minimum contribution of **US\$250,000** to an Approved Public Benefit Project, payable to the Unit.

QUESTIONS? GET IN TOUCH!



+44 (0)20 7318 4343
info@csglobalpartners.com
10 Dover Street Mayfair, London, W1S 4LQ, United Kingdom



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