

November 2023

# Firearm Storage Practices Among Latino and Asian Adults in California

Clarissa Iliff, Michael Rodriguez, George E. Tita



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- > Overall, 6.0% of immigrants reported owning a firearm, with 4.1% of Latino immigrants and 7.2% of Asian immigrants owning at least one firearm.
- > 18.1% of Latino citizens owned at least one firearm or handgun, compared with 12.6% of Asian citizens.
- > Immigrants were more likely than citizens to store guns locked and unloaded (76.5% vs. 45%, respectively).
- > Among Latino immigrants, fear of gun violence victimization was positively associated with the number of firearms kept in the home. The pattern was reversed for Latino citizens, with those least concerned about gun victimization owning more firearms. The number of firearms owned by Asian immigrants showed no clear pattern with respect to fear of gun victimization.

---

Latino and Asian immigrants represent the two largest immigrant populations in California, yet little is known about firearm ownership and storage practices among individuals in these groups. This policy brief explores firearm ownership and storage practices among Latino and Asian adults in California. Using the 2021 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS), this brief reports findings by self-reported citizenship status among adult respondents ages 18 years and older.

Immigrants were significantly more likely to report being “very worried” about becoming the victim of gun violence than adults overall.

## INTRODUCTION

Firearm injury is among the leading causes of preventable death in the United States and disproportionately affects children and young adults.<sup>1</sup> Although the likelihood of gun owners storing firearms locked and unloaded has increased in the last two decades, only about half of U.S. gun owners reported safely storing all of their guns.<sup>2,3</sup> According to the California Office of the Attorney General, safe storage practices consist of storing firearms unloaded, equipping them with a cable or trigger lock, and keeping them in a locked container (such as a safe, gun cabinet, or lockbox). Nevertheless, more than half of gun owners in the United States believe guns make homes safer, and individuals who believe this are more likely to store their firearms both loaded and unlocked.<sup>3</sup>

The 2021 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) included questions related to firearms, including how many firearms and handguns were kept in or around a respondent’s home;

firearm storage practices among individuals who had firearms in the home; ease of firearm access among young adults; and perceptions of risk of being the victim of gun violence. Using data from the 2021 CHIS, researchers have found that in California, immigrants are less likely than nonimmigrants to have a firearm in the home.<sup>4</sup> However, immigrants were significantly more likely to report being “very worried” about becoming the victim of gun violence than adults overall.<sup>4</sup>

California has the largest immigrant population in the U.S., making up 27% of the state’s population, with Latinos and Asians representing the two largest immigrant groups in the state.<sup>5</sup> Research demonstrates elevated risk for accidental gun injury and death related to firearm ownership and unsafe storage practices.<sup>6</sup> It is not known if this finding would hold for immigrants because very little is known about immigrant patterns of firearm ownership and storage practices.

## Exhibit 1 / Firearm and Handgun Ownership Statistics, Asian and Latino Adults, California, 2021

	Citizens		Immigrants	
	Latino	Asian	Latino	Asian
Firearm Ownership	18.1%	12.6%	4.1%	7.2%
Number of Firearms	0.4	0.4	0.1	0.2
Firearm Owners with Handguns	83.5%	86.6%	80.6%	86.0%
Number of Handguns	1.6	2.2	1.3	1.1

Note: Naturalized citizens are included in the citizen group.  
Source: 2021 California Health Interview Survey

This policy brief explores firearm ownership and storage practices by immigrant status among Latino and Asian adults. In this brief, individuals in the immigrant group include noncitizens, regardless of whether they hold a green card. Comparisons are made between and across race, ethnicity, and citizenship

Individuals in the citizen group include U.S.-born and naturalized citizens. We chose to include naturalized citizens in the citizen group because firearm access among naturalized citizens more closely mimics that of citizens.

status for Asians and Latinos. Respondents of all other races and ethnicities are collapsed into the “Other Immigrants” and “Other Citizens” categories.

Age, employment status, and other demographic details of Latino, Asian, and all other citizens and immigrants in the U.S. can be found in the Appendix, Exhibit A1.

The findings below are for all 2021 CHIS adult respondents over the age of 18.

### Ownership Statistics

According to the 2021 CHIS, 17.6% of all California adults reported keeping a firearm at home.<sup>4</sup> The percentage fell to 6.0% for firearm ownership rates among immigrants. Among Latinos and Asians, considerable variation was found. Exhibit 1 includes the firearm and handgun ownership rates among Latino and Asian citizens and immigrants.



In this brief, handgun ownership figures are reported for those respondents who reported owning at least one firearm. In 2021, 4.1% of Latino immigrants and 7.2% of Asian immigrants reported owning at least one firearm. Latino immigrants owned an average of 0.1 firearms, and Asian immigrants owned an average of 0.2 firearms. Among those who owned at least one firearm, Latino immigrants had an average of 1.3 handguns, and Asian immigrants had an average of 1.1 handguns.

Firearm ownership rates between Asian citizens and immigrants show very little difference, with 12.6% of Asian citizens and 7.2% of Asian immigrants owning at least one firearm. However, firearm and handgun ownership rates differed significantly between Latino citizens and immigrants. Among Latino citizens, 18.1% reported owning at least one firearm, a figure more than four times that for Latino immigrants, at 4.1%. Among Asian and Latino citizens and immigrants who report owning at least one firearm, little difference

between handgun ownership rates exists. Nearly 87% of Asian citizens and 86% of Asian immigrants reported owning at least one handgun. Similarly, 83.5% of Latino citizens and 80.6% of Latino immigrants reported owning at least one handgun.

### **Firearm Access**

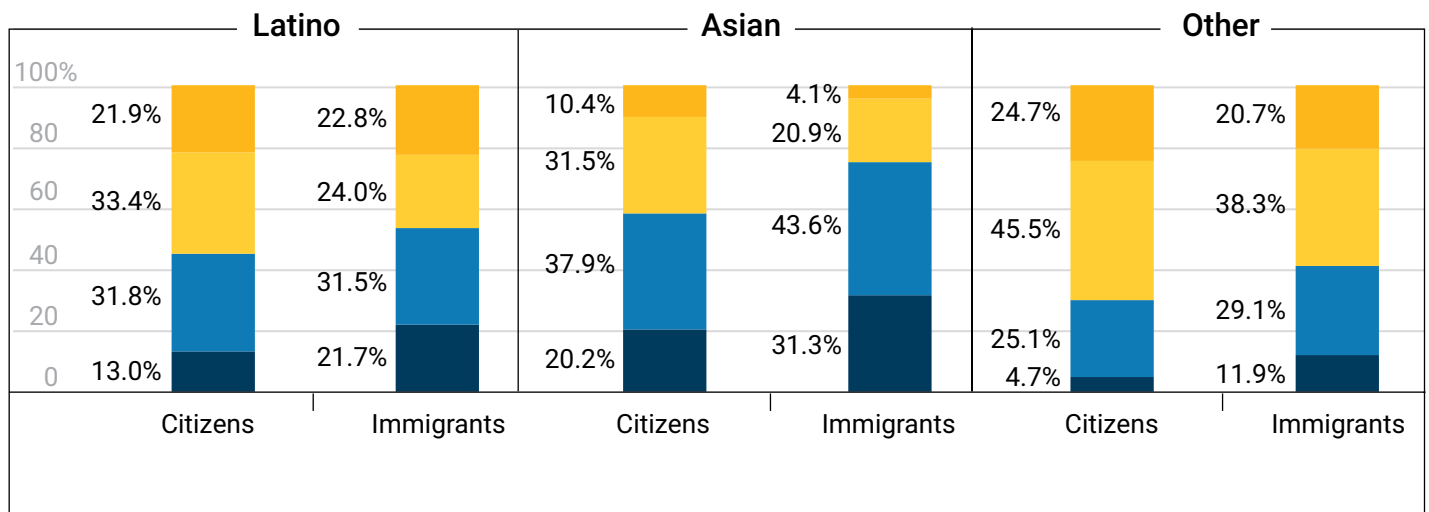
Young adult respondents (18–25 years of age) to the 2021 CHIS survey were asked whether or not they would be able to get a firearm within two days if they wanted one. Overall, young adult immigrants were less likely than citizens to report being able to gain access to a firearm in two days (see Appendix, Exhibit A2).

### **Perceptions of Victimization Risk**

Exhibit 2 shows the reported fear of being a victim of gun violence among Latino, Asian, and other immigrants and citizens. Of Asian immigrants, 74.9% reported being very worried or somewhat worried about being a victim of gun violence, and just over half (53.2%) of Latino immigrants reported those levels of worry.

## Exhibit 2 / Reported Fear of Being a Victim of Gun Violence Among Latino, Asian, and Other Adults, California, 2021

■ Very Worried   
 ■ Somewhat Worried   
 ■ Not too Worried   
 ■ Not at all Worried



Note: Naturalized citizens are included in the citizen group.  
 Source: 2021 California Health Interview Survey

Overall, immigrants were more likely than citizens to report being very worried about being a victim of gun violence.

Exhibit 3 includes the average number of firearms owned by reported fear of being a victim of gun violence across Latino, Asian, and other citizens and immigrants. Fear of being a victim of gun violence was positively associated with the number of firearms owned by Latino immigrants. However, among Latino citizens, a negative relationship was seen between fear of gun violence victimization and firearm ownership. No pattern between firearm ownership and fear of being a victim of gun violence emerged among Asian immigrants or Asian citizens.

Patterns of handgun ownership across race, ethnicity, and citizenship did not emerge as clearly as patterns of firearm ownership. For both Latino immigrants and citizens, the associations between worry about being a victim of gun violence and ownership of firearms was not statistically significant. (For a complete breakdown of the average number of handguns owned by reported fear of being a victim to gun violence across Latino, Asian, and other citizens and immigrants, see Appendix, Exhibit A3). For Asians and for individuals included in the “other” group of immigrants and citizens, figures for handgun ownership were either not available or considered to be statistically unstable; comparisons across these groups are therefore not available.

**Exhibit 3 / Average Number of Firearms by Fear of Being a Victim of Gun Violence Among Latino, Asian, and Other Adults, California, 2021**

		Very Worried	Somewhat Worried	Not Too Worried	Not At All Worried
Latino	Citizens	0.11	0.29	0.51	0.77
	Immigrants	0.24	0.01 <sup>†</sup>	0.05	0.13 <sup>†</sup>
Asian	Citizens	0.50 <sup>†</sup>	0.22	0.50	0.85
	Immigrants	0.12 <sup>†</sup>	0.17 <sup>†</sup>	0.29	0.13 <sup>†</sup>
Other	Citizens	0.35	0.67	0.81	1.16
	Immigrants	0.15 <sup>†</sup>	0.03 <sup>†</sup>	0.31 <sup>†</sup>	0.86 <sup>†</sup>

† Measurement is considered unstable.  
 Note: Naturalized citizens are included in the citizen group.  
 Source: 2021 California Health Interview Survey

**Storage Practices**

Individuals who reported owning at least one firearm were asked about their firearm storage practices. Overall, 76.5% of immigrants reported storing all firearms locked and unloaded, compared to 45% of citizens. Among citizens, 6.1% reported storing at least one gun unlocked and loaded (see Appendix, Exhibit A4), although this figure is not available among immigrants.

**IMPLICATIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Asian citizens and immigrants surveyed in the 2021 CHIS reported lower levels of firearm ownership compared with Latino citizens.

Nationally, Asians also have the lowest gun homicide rate, suggesting that limited access to firearms may partially account for this broader finding.<sup>7</sup>

Lower gun ownership rates among immigrants as compared with citizens may be the result of several factors. First, assimilation among citizens may encourage firearm ownership. Second, there may be significant underreporting of firearm and handgun ownership among immigrants, particularly those who are not legally permitted to own guns. Nevertheless, the absence of a firearm in the home might be one contributing factor in the reported healthier outcomes of immigrants compared to citizens.



# 76.5%

of immigrants reported storing all firearms locked and unloaded, compared to 45% of citizens.

Gun ownership rates differed between Latino immigrants and citizens, but not between Asian immigrants and citizens. Furthermore, rates of gun ownership were higher among Asian immigrants than Latino immigrants. The opposite was true for citizens, with Latino citizens reporting a higher rate of gun ownership than Asian citizens. Future research should explore these differences to understand why gun ownership rates vary across race, ethnicity, and citizenship status.

Questions related to firearm ownership and storage practices were first asked in the 2021 wave of CHIS. Firearm and handgun ownership rates were already quite low among immigrants generally. As a result, we were unable to include detailed data on firearm storage practices among immigrant subpopulations. Continuing to collect data on firearm ownership and storage practices

in later waves of CHIS may allow for two future lines of research. First, we may be able to explore firearm ownership and storage practices across categories of interest, including immigrant subpopulations. Second, temporal data will allow us to observe changes in firearm ownership rates and storage practices over time, as well as how these changes vary with changes in reported levels of worry about being a victim of gun violence. This second question is especially important in light of the rise of anti-immigrant, especially anti-Asian, rhetoric.

### Author Information

George E. Tita, PhD, is a professor of Criminology, Law and Society and director of the Livable Cities Lab at the University of California – Irvine. Michael Rodriguez, MD, MPH, is executive director of the California Alliance of Academics and Communities for Public Health Equity, senior advisor at the California Academic Health Department Project, and professor emeritus in the Department of Family Medicine at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. Clarissa Iloff, MPP, is a doctoral student in the department of Criminology, Law and Society at the University of California – Irvine.

### Funder Information

Support for this policy brief was generously provided by the National Collaborative on Gun Violence Research. The contents of this work are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official view of any of the authors' or contributors' funders or employers.





The California Health Interview Survey covers a wide array of health-related topics, including health insurance coverage, health status and behaviors, and access to health care. It is based on interviews conducted continuously throughout the year with respondents from more than 20,000 California households. CHIS interviews were offered in English, Spanish, Chinese (both Mandarin and Cantonese), Vietnamese, Korean, and Tagalog. CHIS is designed with complex survey methods requiring analysts to use complex survey weights in order to provide accurate variance estimates and statistical testing. CHIS is a collaboration of the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, the California Department of Public Health, the California Department of Health Care Services, and the Public Health Institute. For other information about CHIS, visit [chis.ucla.edu](http://chis.ucla.edu).

## Suggested Citation

Iliff C, Rodriguez M, Tita GE. 2023. *Firearm Storage Practices Among Latino and Asian Adults in California*. Los Angeles, Calif.: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research.

## Endnotes

- 1 Goldstick JE, Cunningham RM, Carter PM. 2022. Current Causes of Death in Children and Adolescents in the United States. *New England Journal of Medicine* 386(20): 1955–1956.
- 2 Crifasi CK, Doucette ML, McGinty EE, Webster DW, Barry CL. 2018. Storage Practices of U.S. Gun Owners in 2016. *American Journal of Public Health* 108(4): 532–537.
- 3 Mauri AI, Wolfson JA, Azrael D, Miller M. 2019. Firearm Storage Practices and Risk Perceptions. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 57(6): 830–835.
- 4 Banawa R, Tan S. 2022. *Despite California's Strong Gun Laws and Regulations, Issues of Gun Safety and Fears of Gun Violence Remain*. Los Angeles, Calif.: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research.
- 5 Perez C, Cuellar Mejia M, Johnson H. 2023. *Immigrants in California*. Public Policy Institute of California.
- 6 Miller M, Azrael D, Hemenway D, Vrinotis M. 2005. Firearm Storage Practices and Rates of Unintentional Firearm Deaths in the United States. *Accident Analysis & Prevention* 37(4) : 661–667.
- 7 QuickStats: Age-Adjusted Rates of Firearm-Related Homicide, by Race, Hispanic Origin, and Sex – National Vital Statistics System, United States, 2021. 2023. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 72: 737. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7226a9>

## Acknowledgments

The authors appreciate the support and thoughtful reviews provided by Ninez Ponce, PhD, MPP; AJ Scheitler, EdD; Sean Tan, MPP; and the rest of the team at the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. We thank P. Jeffrey Brantingham of UCLA and Gregory Ridgeway of UPenn for their helpful comments.

ISSN 2691-7475

10960 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 1550  
Los Angeles, California 90024  
Phone: 310-794-0909  
Fax: 310-794-2686  
Email: [chpr@ucla.edu](mailto:chpr@ucla.edu)  
[healthpolicy.ucla.edu](http://healthpolicy.ucla.edu)

The UCLA Center for Health Policy Research  
is part of the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health.

The analyses, interpretations, conclusions, and views  
expressed in this policy brief are those of the authors  
and do not necessarily represent the UCLA Center for  
Health Policy Research, the Regents of the University  
of California, or collaborating organizations or funders.

PB2023-5  
Copyright © 2023 by the Regents  
of the University of California.  
All Rights Reserved.

Editor-in-Chief: Ninez A. Ponce, PhD, MPP



Read this  
publication  
online

