

Regional Equity Study of the California Central Coast Region: Data and Analysis for a More Equitable Future

September 2020

The Division of Social Sciences at UCSB, in partnership with the Fund for Santa Barbara and other community-based organizations, and with the University of Southern California Equity Research Institute (ERI), has committed to launching the first Central Coast Regional Equity Study in the course of 2020-21. The goal of this research project is to deepen our understanding of regional disparities, facilitate a region-wide conversation, and support the planning and implementation of initiatives focused on advancing social, health, environmental, and economic equity. Covering Santa Barbara and Ventura counties, the study is designed to yield a periodically updated equity database, of use for teaching, research, policy, and action. The initial data compilation component of this two-county regional project was initiated in the summer of 2020.

An equitable region is one in which all residents, regardless of race/ethnicity or nativity, neighborhood of residence, are fully able to participate in economic vitality, contribute to the region's readiness for the future, and take full advantage of the region's assets and resources. A strong current of social science research confirms that inequality hinders economic growth and prosperity, and conversely, that greater economic and social inclusion fosters social cohesion, environmental health, and sustainable prosperity as well as a wider range of civic capacities that enable people from diverse communities to exercise political voice. This suggests that equity—full inclusion of all residents in the economic, social, and political life of the region—is not only a crucial value in its own right, but also, essential for regional health and prosperity.

Over the past several decades, socio-economic inequality has been on the rise, as manifest in disparities in income, employment, education, and health that affect communities of color in Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties, where Latinos represent population majorities in a number of cities. The depth of these inequities has been laid bare by the COVID crisis, with consequences that we are just beginning to gauge. They also put equity at the forefront of our priorities as we set our sights toward recovery, and a future of genuinely shared, environmentally sustainable prosperity.

The Central Coast Regional Equity Study uses rigorous, community engaged research both to bring socioeconomic inequities—and the price we pay for them—to light, and to establish concrete guideposts for regional equity. The project is guided by a steering committee convened by the UCSB Blum Center and the Fund for Santa Barbara, composed of UCSB faculty and key community and regional stakeholders. Among its immediate products will be a tailored report on the two-county region for broad public dissemination as well as targeted briefings with policymakers and community organizations. The data from this unique collaboration will be archived in UCSB's Broom Center, in a manner that will facilitate access for research and teaching, and that will lay the groundwork for periodic updating and enhancement as part of UCSB's commitment to fostering socially engaged public-facing research.