

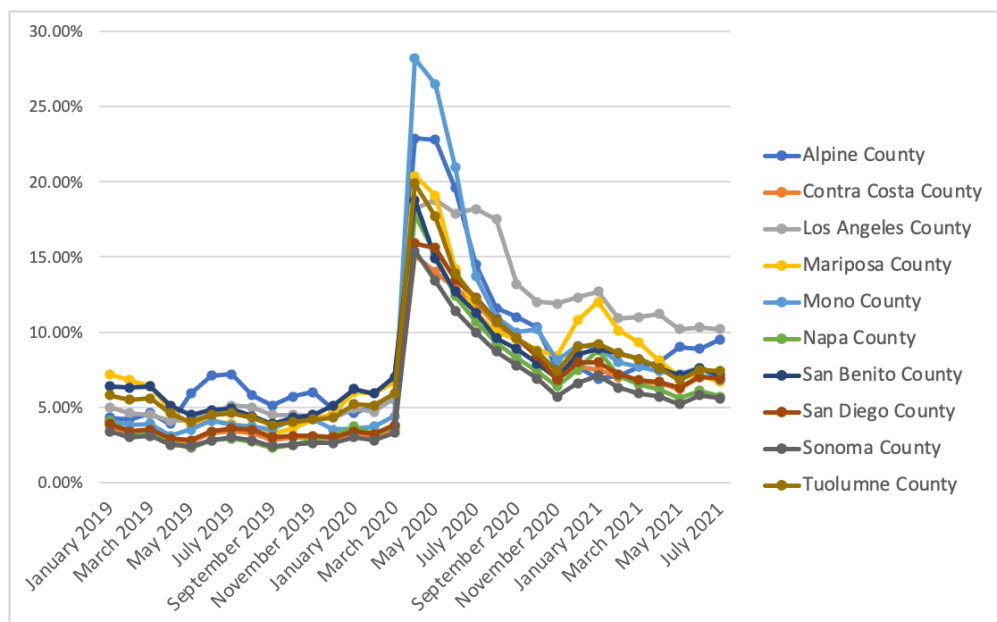
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Journalism 411, Sec 03

Unemployment Rates in California Counties During the Peak of the COVID-19 Pandemic

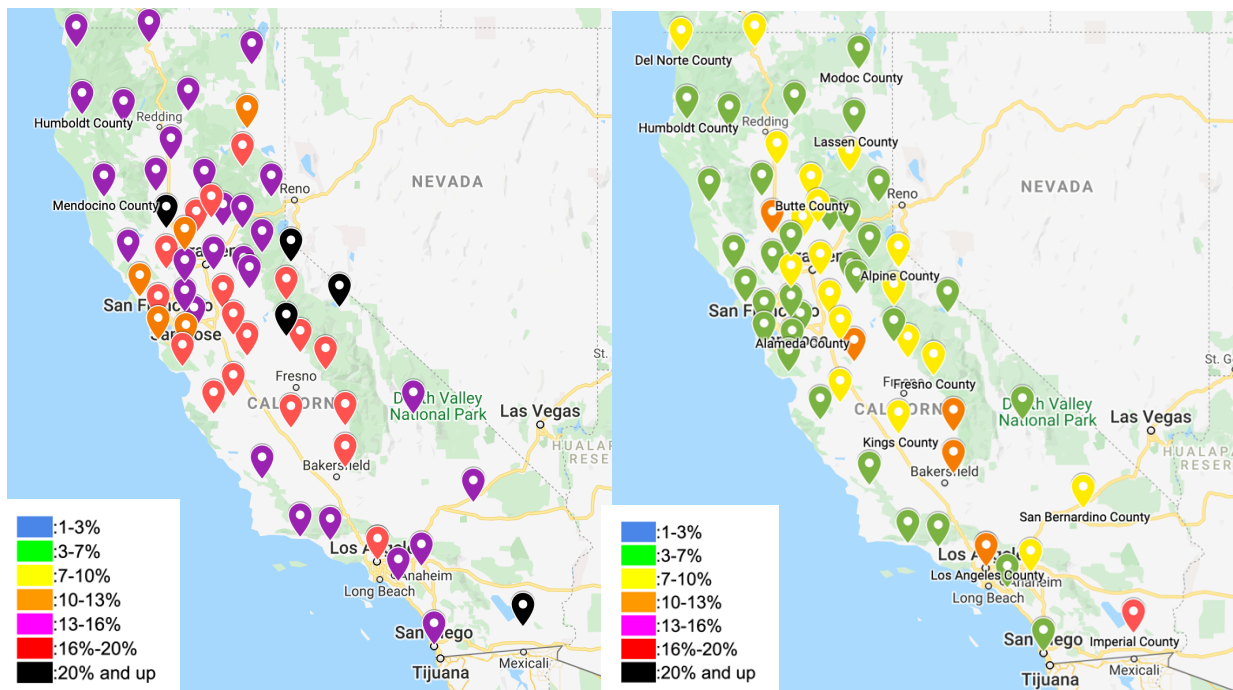
The unemployment rate in all California counties increased 9.6% on average from March 2020 to April 2020. This increase can be attributed to side effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown.

The [Local Area Unemployment Statistics](#) from the California Employment Development Department data portal lists unemployment data from 1976 to the present on a month by month basis. Data from 2019-2021 was used to measure the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on unemployment across the state. The unemployment rate is calculated by dividing total unemployment by the labor force, which is defined as all residents in a county who are employed or are actively seeking work. Our analysis ends with data from July 2021, as that was the most recent information available as of the date of download. It has since been updated to include unemployment data through October 2021.



This timeline shows the top ten counties that experienced the greatest change in their unemployment rate due to the first lockdown order in March 2020. All counties in California peaked in April 2020, which is the first month of data that registered change due to the coronavirus. The county with the highest unemployment rate was Mono County, which had 4.4% unemployment pre-pandemic and 28.2% in April 2020.

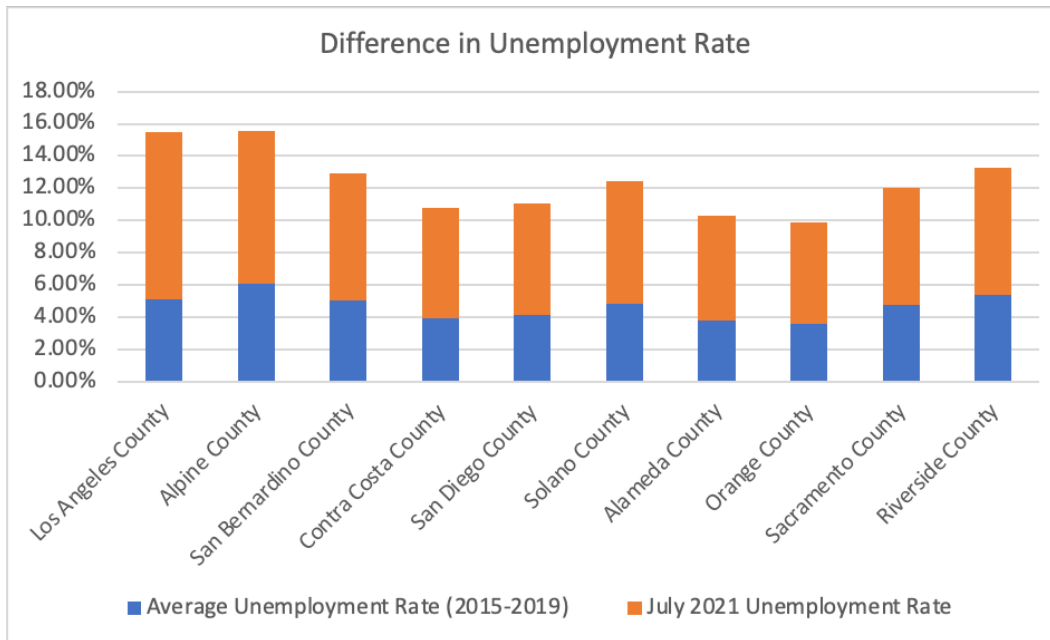
These counties all had relatively low unemployment rates to begin with, and while counties with greater unemployment rates increased to a similar level, less can be attributed to the impact of COVID-19.



The map on the left shows the unemployment rate in all counties across California in [April 2020](#). The black dots signify an unemployment rate of 20% or higher. These counties are Imperial, Mono, Mariposa, Alpine and Colusa.

On the right, the map shows all counties in [July 2021](#), after several months of economic recovery. The counties with the highest unemployment rate include Imperial, Los Angeles, Kern, Tulare, Merced and Colusa. Imperial County had the highest unemployment rate in the entire

state in July 2021 at 19.5%. These maps show that the counties that peaked the highest in April 2020 are not necessarily the slowest to return to their pre-pandemic rates.



This bar chart identifies the ten counties that are furthest from “normal,” defined by a five-year average spanning from January 2015 to December 2019. This average was calculated by taking data from each month in the period and creating a new dataset, which was then compared to the most recent unemployment data available.

It is significant to note that these counties all have relatively low unemployment rates in a non-pandemic year. Alpine County has the greatest average unemployment rate of the listed counties at 6.07%, whereas Imperial County has an average of 21.62% in the same time frame. This indicates that a high unemployment rate in July 2021 does not necessarily mean that the county is experiencing high unemployment because of the coronavirus pandemic. Rather, the process of recovery depends on the economic conditions of each individual county.

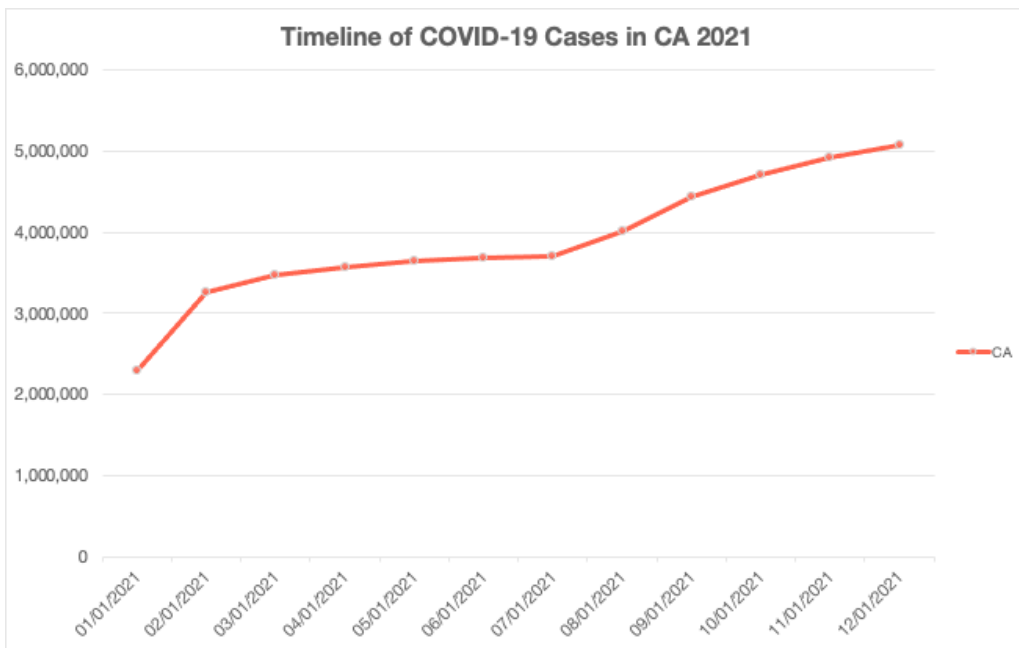
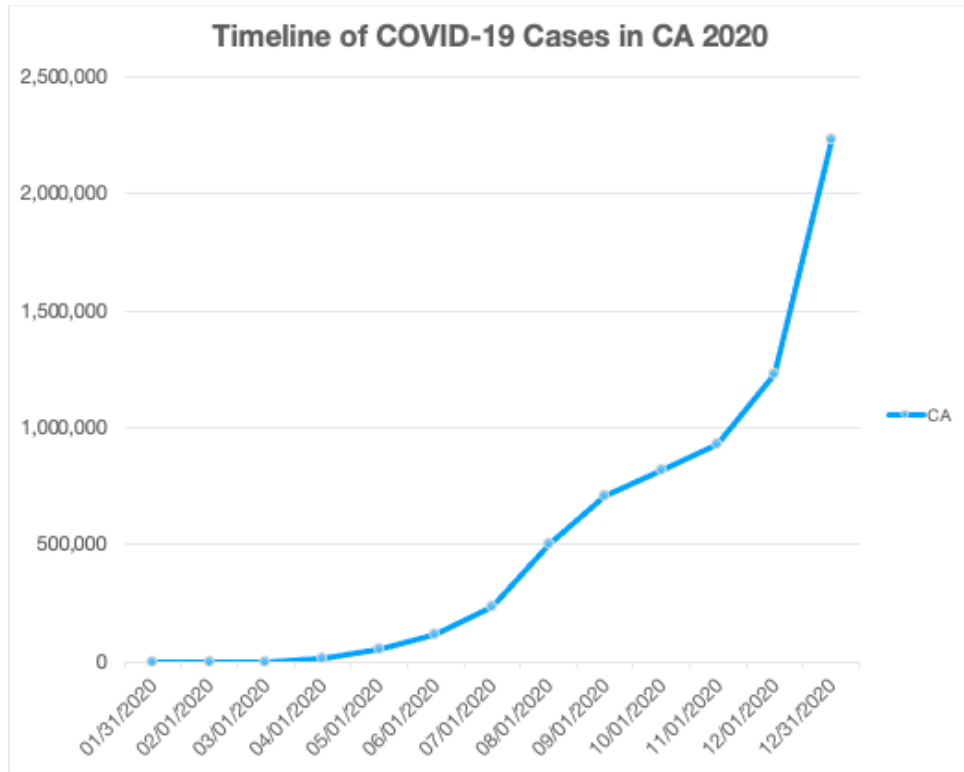
**Top 10 Impoverished California
Counties in 2019**

**Bottom 10 Impoverished California
Counties in 2019**

County	Poverty Percent	County	Poverty Percent
Inyo County	22%	Santa Cruz County	6.1%
Mono County	20.5%	Santa Barbara County	6.1%
Glenn County	20.5%	Plumas County	6.6%
Imperial County	19.1%	Mariposa County	6.9%
Kings County	19%	Stanislaus County	7.2%
Tuolumne County	18.9%	Nevada County	7.4%
Lassen County	18.3%	Del Norte County	7.9%
El Dorado County	17.9%	Yolo County	8.2%
Marin County	17.6%	Fresno County	8.7%
Solano County	17.4%	Alpine County	8.9%

The data is from the [United States Census Bureau](#); it is the most recent data available.

The tables depict the 10 least and most impoverished California counties in 2019. There is no direct correlation between impoverishment and unemployment rate in California counties. There were counties from both extremes (most and least impoverished in 2019) that experienced significant increases in unemployment in April 2020. For instance, Mariposa and Alpine counties were amongst the top 10 least impoverished in 2019 but experienced some of the highest unemployment increases in April 2020. Similarly, Mono, Tuolumne and Solano counties were some of the most impoverished counties in 2019 and they also experienced significant increases in unemployment rate in April 2020. Therefore, poverty was not a critical factor in determining the change in unemployment per county.



COVID-19 cases were not tracked by the [CDC](#) until March 2020. This dataset counts the sum of both confirmed and probable cases, so there is some room for error in the counts. There

are a minimal number of cases in California until Summer 2020, when cases begin doubling every month. The increase in cases continued at a much slower pace until the holiday season (December 2020-January 2021), when they doubled once again. There has been a steady increase in the number of cases ever since, but it is fairly stable.

There is no correlation between coronavirus cases and unemployment rate, as the months with the most cases are the same months that began to see economic recovery according to the timeline. Across the state, counties saw more people returning to work each month, and the few exceptions remained stable instead of experiencing a second spike. For example, Los Angeles County jumped 0.2% between June and July 2020, but fell -0.7% by August, resulting in a net decrease. This suggests that the count of cases was not directly impacting the unemployment rate.

Looking at poverty data and the number of coronavirus cases does not explain the drastic change in unemployment in April 2020. Rather, the beginning of the shift can be traced to the first lockdown order in March of that year. According to [usa.gov](https://www.usa.gov), stimulus checks were sent out in April 2020, December 2020-January 2021, and March 2021. It is possible that these payments may have impacted the unemployment rate in California counties.

It is important to pay attention to each county individually because there are important details that cannot be represented by the full picture alone. The counties that appear worse off according to the data are also the counties that have some of the lowest unemployment rates and the most poverty. Each county has unique conditions and their recovery from the economic downturn in response to COVID-19 reflects that.