



Examining Trends in Education Outcomes between and within San Francisco and Los Angeles

Sumaya Musse



Abstract:

This paper compares educational result patterns in San Francisco (SF) county and Los Angeles (LA) county to discover the elements that influence these outcomes, such as unemployment rates and wealth disparities. The research investigates the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of education in these cities using data from the St. Louis Federal Reserve and other relevant sources. We observe a higher percentage of residents in SF county having a bachelor degree or higher compared to LA county. This finding is consistent across time. Our findings seek to help policymakers establish focused policies to alleviate educational gaps and enhance overall performance. Understanding these tendencies aims to help improve educational fairness and stimulate economic growth through better-prepared pupils. The research is designed to first describe educational patterns in San Francisco and Los Angeles, then explain possible causes of these trends, and then make policy recommendations for reform.

Introduction:

Understanding the factors influencing education outcomes in big cities such as San Francisco (SF) and Los Angeles (LA) is critical for various reasons. For example, improving education policy and identifying patterns can help policymakers create focused actions to alleviate educational inequality. Another factor is closing the achievement gap by examining variations between and across cities, which might reveal places where certain student groups require further attention. This paper investigates the qualitative and quantitative factors contributing to educational outcome trends between San Francisco and Los Angeles. The importance of this paper and this research is that education is a variable affecting economic growth. Identifying certain disparities in educational outcomes can help us determine resources and how to prepare students for success. The paper is structured as follows: 1) showing education trends in LA and SF using data from the St. Louis Fed, 2) explaining why these trends exist, and 3) outlining policy recommendations to improve educational outcomes.

Methods:

Educational outcomes were proxied by a bachelor's Degree or higher (5-year estimate) in LA County and SF county. The data show how much the percentage of county residents with a bachelor's degree is changing on a 12-year scale from 2010 to 2022. We collected these data from the US Census Bureau. Our analysis of the data is descriptive in that we explain the trends over time within counties as well as compare the outcome between counties. The latter allows us to compare the average difference in the percentage of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher between the two counties, generally.

We chose these data to proxy educational attainment of the county, generally. although there are drawbacks from not following individuals, schools, or school districts over time. We provide a more detailed discussion of this in the limitations section of our paper.

Results:

Figure 1 depicts the proportion of Los Angeles County people having a bachelor's degree or above, from 2010 to 2022. Over the years, the data reflect a general rising trend in educational attainment, albeit more gradually than in San Francisco County. The percentage of degree holders is steadily increasing, with slight swings and occasional plateaus. Notably, the years 2014-2016 and 2019-2021 show a somewhat faster increase. By 2022, the percentage of inhabitants with a bachelor's degree or above will be much greater than in 2010, indicating that educational attainment in Los Angeles County has continued to rise during the last 12 years.

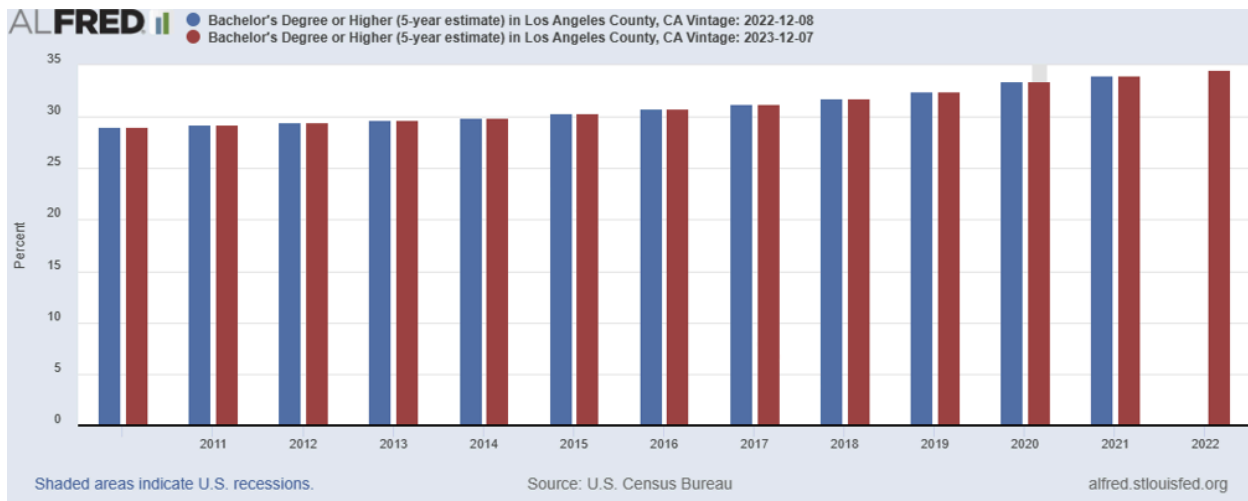


Figure 1: a 5-year estimate of the percentage of Los Angeles county residents with bachelor's degree or higher from 2010-2022. (*Bachelor's Degree or Higher (5-Year Estimate) in Los Angeles County, CA, 2023*)

Figure 2 shows the percentage of San Francisco County people having a bachelor's degree or more from 2010 to 2022. The figures show a strong rising trend over the past 12 years, demonstrating an overall rise in educational attainment among people. While the trend is generally good, there are some slight yearly swings. Significant periods of increased growth are recorded between 2012-2015 and 2018-2020. Toward the conclusion of the era, the growth rate looks to level out, indicating that the percentage of inhabitants with a bachelor's degree or more has reached a plateau. Overall, the results show considerable increases in higher education attainment in San Francisco County over time.

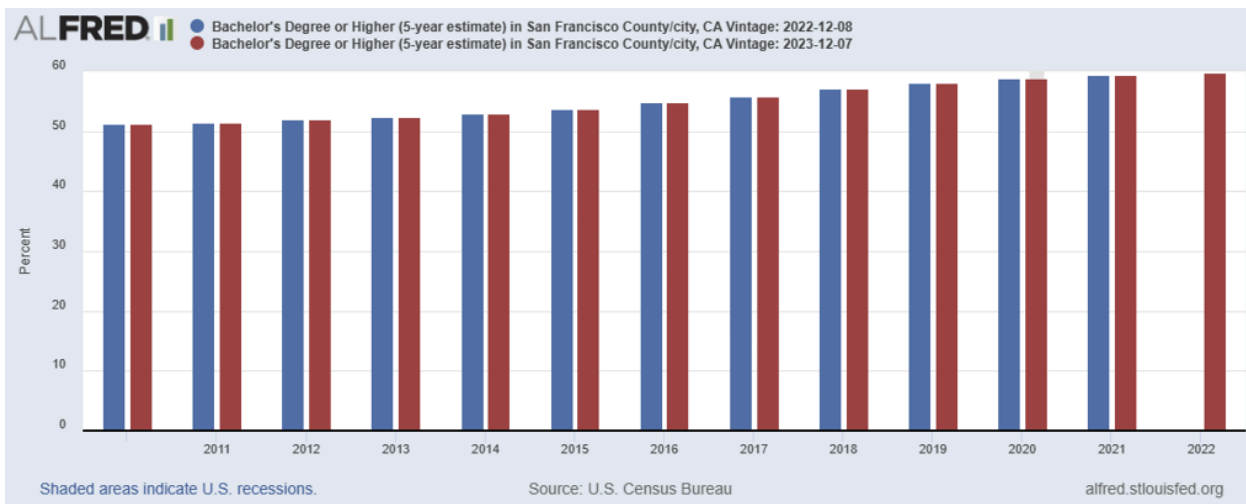


Figure 2: a 5-year estimate of the percentage of San Francisco county residents with bachelor's degree or higher from 2010-2022. (*Bachelor's Degree or Higher (5-Year Estimate) in San Francisco County/City, CA, 2023*)



Table 1: Annual growth rate in the percentage of residents with a bachelor’s degree or higher in San Francisco and Los Angeles counties from 2010 to 2022

Year	San Francisco		Los Angeles	
	% BA or Higher	AGR	% BA or Higher	AGR
2010	51.2		29.2	0.7%
2011	51.4	0.4%	29.5	1.0%
2012	52	1.2%	29.7	0.7%
2013	52.4	0.8%	29.9	0.7%
2014	52.9	1.0%	30.3	1.3%
2015	53.8	1.7%	30.8	1.7%
2016	54.8	1.9%	31.2	1.3%
2017	55.8	1.8%	31.8	1.9%
2018	57.1	2.3%	32.5	2.2%
2019	58.1	1.8%	33.5	3.1%
2020	58.8	1.2%	34	1.5%
2021	59.5	1.2%	34.6	1.8%
2022	59.8	0.5%	29.2	0.7%
Avg	55.2	1.3%	31.2	1.5%
SD	3.1	0.57%	1.8	0.68%

Table 1 shows the growth rate of education outcomes over time in San Francisco and Los Angeles counties. In 2010, 29% of residents in Los Angeles County had a bachelor’s degree or higher whereas 50% of residents in San Francisco County had a bachelor’s degree or higher. In 2022, at the end of the study period, approximately 34% of residents in Los Angeles County had a bachelor’s degree or higher and roughly 60% of residents in San Francisco County had a bachelor’s degree or higher. The AAGR in the percentage of residents with a bachelor’s degree or higher from 2010 to 2022 was 1.5% (SD: 0.68%) in Los Angeles county and 1.3% (SD: 0.57%) in San Francisco county. The highest annual growth rate in San Francisco county occurred between years 2018 and 2020 compared to years 2016 and 2018 in LA county.

Across our study period, the percentage of residents with a bachelor’s degree in San Francisco County was more than that of residents with a bachelor’s degree in Los Angeles County within each year. Although San Francisco county had a slightly lower AAGR and standard deviation than Los Angeles County, both counties show a positive and linear trend in the outcome over time.

Discussion:

San Francisco tends to have more education than Los Angeles and we broke it down into a couple of factors such as economic factors, tech industry, and universities. Because San Francisco has a higher living cost, they also have higher income, which may translate into parents taking their kids to better schools and tutoring and more funding in educational programs. Based on the tech industry San Francisco and Silicon Valley are both known for their massive influence with many companies and startups that draw in people who are looking for a bigger environment to bring their talents to the table. San Francisco has an Ivy League university known as Stanford and other prestigious universities like the University of California Berkeley (UC Berkeley) University Of San Francisco (USF). Having these institutions means more people will want to come to the city because of the opportunity.

Los Angeles had a little bit more factors as to why it has less education than San Francisco three of the most important factors as to why this would be societal and cultural factors are also the high school dropout rate. Los Angeles is a big hub for the entertainment industry whether it be music, acting, or comedy most people come to LA to follow their passion rather than education. Los Angeles is also more known for its cultural influence, and tourism. In the past, Los Angeles' public schools have seen a significant number of dropouts. Several factors, including a lack of resources, packed classes, and socioeconomic difficulties, can cause students to drop out of school before finishing their education.

Improving education in Los Angeles would require a different outlook on various aspects of the education system using strategies. These strategies include enhancing k-12 education, increasing funding for schools to have smaller class sizes, updated curriculums including early childhood education and well maintained environments. Community and parental involvement should be encouraged through workshops and afterschool programs. Access to higher education can be improved with more scholarships, stronger community colleges, and career exploration pathways. The government of San Francisco invests more money into tech and finance careers. These sectors attract people with higher education compared to entertainment. Entertainment makes up a larger percentage of the Los Angeles economy than the San Francisco economy (*Each California Region Tells a Different Job Story, 2024*). From table 2, we observe that San Francisco employs a greater percentage of its residents in 1) Management, business, finance, and 2) engineering, computers, science. Contrarily, Los Angeles employs a greater percentage of its residents in 1) production, transportation, material moving, and 2) arts, design, media, sports, entertainment.

Table 2. Percent of San Francisco and Los Angeles residence employed by a few sectors in 2024

	Los Angeles	San Francisco
Management, business, finance	15.9%	26.3%
Engineering, computers, science	4.9%	14.6%
Production, transportation, material moving	11.8%	5.7%
Arts, design, media, sports, entertainment	7.1%	5.2%

Source: *2024 Compare Cities Job Market: Los Angeles, ca vs San Francisco, CA, 2024. BestPlaces.net collects data from various public sources.*

Limitations:

Follow-up studies can address limitations of our paper. First, researchers could investigate the number of trade schools in California and how the number of graduates has changed over time, focusing on the last decade. Similarly, a study could examine different factors that influence these trends, like economic conditions and changes in industry demand. Second, our study failed to address the trend in community college graduates. It would be insightful to determine the amount of community college graduates every year, how it has changed over time and also how the stigma has changed. For example, researchers could determine how many students transfer to a four year institution every year. This is important because most community college students do not just stop at an associates degree, and there may be a trend over time. Longitudinal data from trade schools and community colleges in California could be used to describe the above. Moreover, subsequent analysis could be performed on how these trends differ between San Francisco and Los Angeles considering the economic structure of each city.



References:

2024 Compare Cities Job Market: Los Angeles, CA vs San Francisco, CA. (2024).

Bestplaces.net. https://www.bestplaces.net/compare-cities/los_angeles_ca/san_francisco_ca/jobs

Bachelor's Degree or Higher (5-year estimate) in Los Angeles County, CA. (2023). Stlouisfed.org.

<https://alfred.stlouisfed.org/series?seid=HC01ESTVC1706037>

Bachelor's Degree or Higher (5-year estimate) in San Francisco County/city, CA. (2023).

Stlouisfed.org. <https://alfred.stlouisfed.org/series?seid=HC01ESTVC1706075>

Each California Region Tells a Different Job Story. (2024). Public Policy Institute of California.

<https://www.ppic.org/blog/each-california-region-tells-a-different-job-story/>