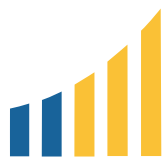


THE STATE OF West Virginia's Immigrants



WEST VIRGINIA CENTER ON
BUDGET & POLICY



**American Friends
Service Committee**

By Sean O'Leary and Rick Wilson

STATE OF WORKING WEST VIRGINIA 2019:

The State of West Virginia's Immigrants

Introduction

West Virginia's immigrants come from all over the world and while a small share of the populations, they are broadly represented throughout the state's workforce and economy. But a fuller conversation about immigrants tends to be overshadowed by the controversy in the U.S. around immigration reform. This conversation all too often tends to paint immigrants as a homogenous group. The conversation ought to reflect an informed understanding of this dynamic population, its diverse contributions to the economy and the challenges immigrants face.

This report attempts to have that deeper conversation, reflecting on the history of immigrants in West Virginia, the challenges they have faced, how they've become enmeshed in the fabric of the state, and their role in the state today.

Key Findings

- Immigrants account for less than 2 percent of West Virginia's population, but growth in the state's immigrant population has helped slow the state's population loss.
- About 53 percent of West Virginia's immigrants are naturalized citizens, while the rest are temporary and permanent legal residents, recently arrived refugees and undocumented immigrants.
- West Virginia's immigrants come from around the world, and are more diverse than the national immigrant population.
- West Virginia's immigrants are on average, older than U.S. born West Virginians. This appears to be due to a number of factors, including that most immigrants are of prime-working age who come to the U.S. to work, and the children of immigrants are often U.S. born, skewing the average age of immigrants.
- Immigrants' share in the labor force, small business ownership and economic output all slightly exceed their representation in the population.
- More than half of West Virginia's immigrants work in white-collar and healthcare related occupations.
- There is some concentration of immigrants in high wage jobs, as well as low wage jobs. The same is true with income.
- Among low income immigrants, many struggle and are often excluded from public support.
- The concentration of immigrants in high income levels is tied to higher levels of education, even though immigrants with a college degree earn less than U.S. born West Virginians with a degree.
- Immigrants are more likely to have a college education than native born West Virginians.
- Poverty rates are slightly higher for immigrants than native born West Virginians.
- Citizenship status is a major factor to immigrants' economic security.

SECTION 1

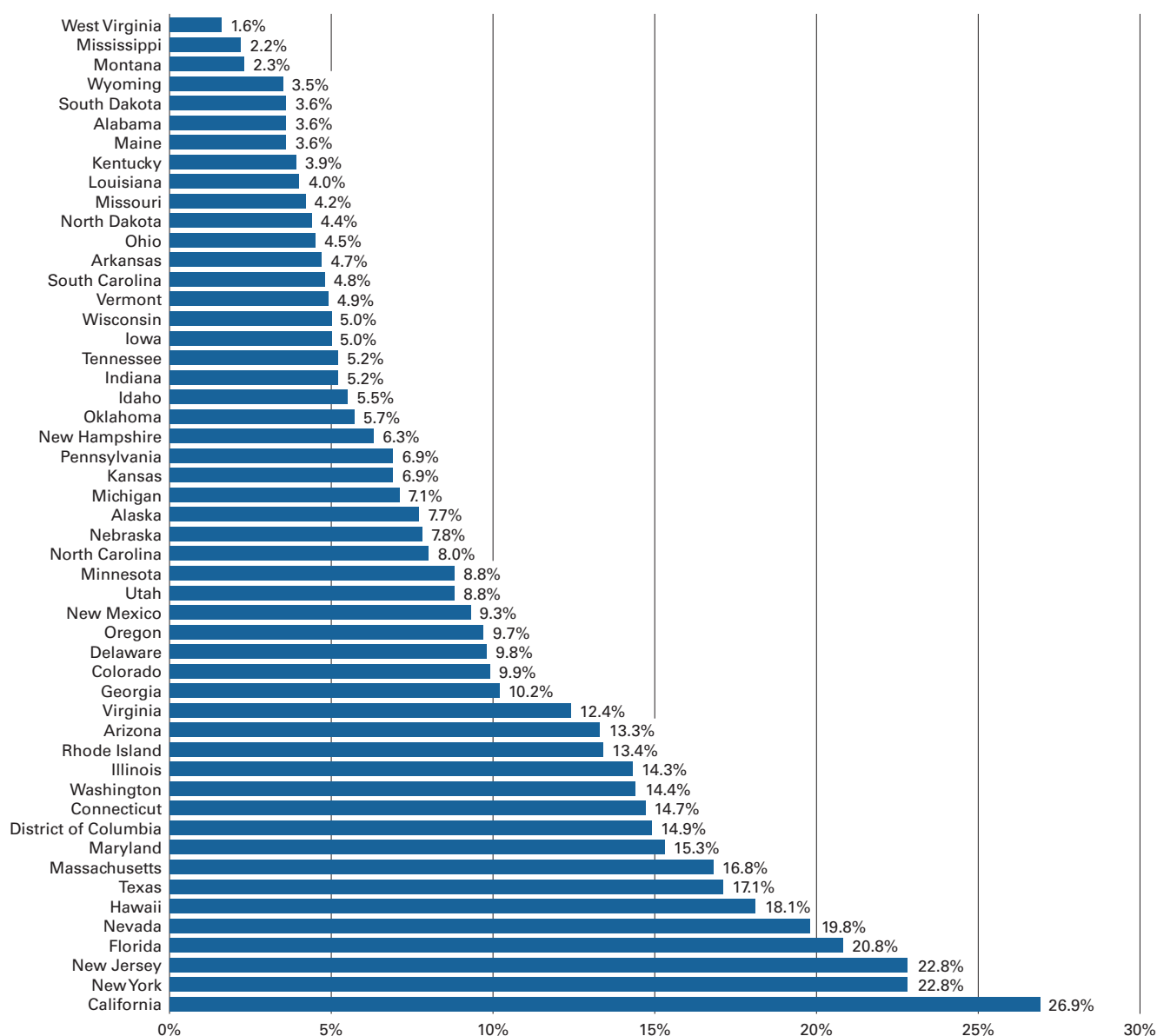
Immigrants a Small but Growing Part of West Virginia's Fabric Today

West Virginia's Immigrant Population

In 2017, there were 30,000 immigrants in West Virginia, or 1.6 percent of the state's 1.8 million residents. As a share of its population, West Virginia has the smallest amount of immigrants among the states. Nationally 13.6 percent of the population are immigrants.

Figure 1

Immigrants as a Share of State Population, 2017



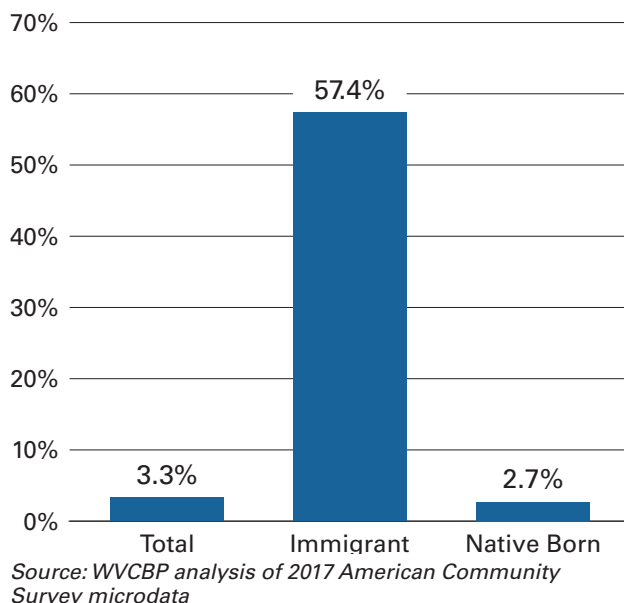
Source: WVCBP analysis of 2017 American Community Survey microdata

While West Virginia's immigrant population is small, it is growing and at a much faster rate than the rest of the states. Since 2001, West Virginia's total population has grown by 57,000, or just 3.3 percent, and has been declining since 2011. While the state's native born population has grown by only 2.7 percent, or 47,000 people since 2001, the state's immigrant population has grown by 57.4 percent, an increase of 11,000 people. **(Figure 2)**. Despite making up less than 2 percent of the population, immigrants have accounted for 19 percent of the state's population growth since 2011.

According to the most recent Census data, about 53 percent of West Virginia's immigrants are naturalized citizens. The remaining 47 percent include immigrants with legal permanent or temporary residence, refugees and undocumented immigrants. The Pew Research Center estimates that there were fewer than 5,000 undocumented immigrants in West Virginia in 2016, roughly 14 percent of all immigrants, and 0.2 percent of the state's population.¹

Figure 2

Percent Change in Population, West Virginia, 2001-2017

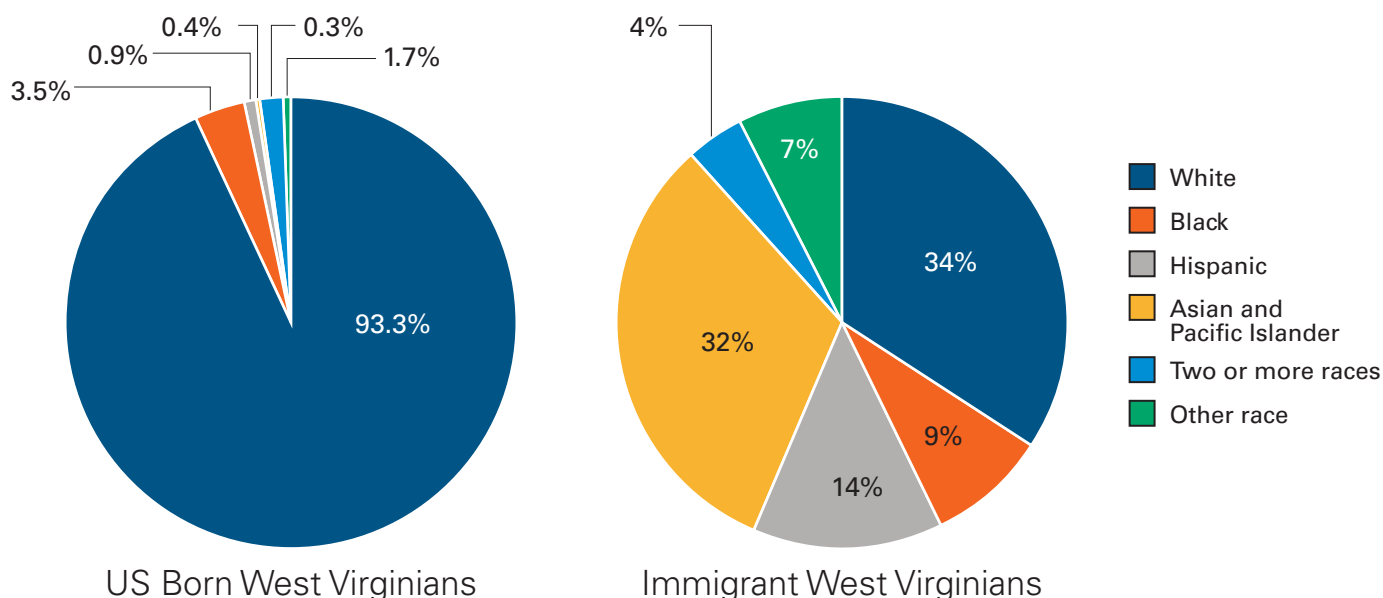


Demographics

Immigrants and foreign-born West Virginians differ greatly when it comes to race and ethnicity. While more than nine out of 10 U.S. born West Virginians are white, only one-third of the state's immigrants are white. Only one-quarter of one percent of U.S. born West Virginians are Asian but more than a third of immigrants are Asian. **(Figure 3)**

Figure 3

Demographics of West Virginians



Source: WVCPB analysis of 2017 5-year American Community Survey microdata

While immigration in the United States is much more diverse than is often recognized, it's true that the predominant group of immigrants in the United States is Hispanic, and the biggest country of origin is Mexico, with more than 25 percent of the nation's immigrants coming from Mexico. However, the picture in West Virginia is very different. In terms of nativity, West Virginia biggest group of immigrants were born in India, but make up only 15.6 percent of the state's immigrant population. The next three most common places of birth—China (8.6%), Mexico (8.5%), and Africa (7.3%)—account for the next 25 percent. Following these, West Virginia's largest populations of immigrants come from South America, Philippines, and Germany.

Of West Virginia's foreign-born population, 74 percent speak English very well or speak only English. Only 2 percent do not speak English. Aside from English, the most common languages spoken by immigrants in West Virginia are Spanish (18 percent), Chinese (8 percent), Hindi and related languages (6 percent) and Arabic (5 percent).

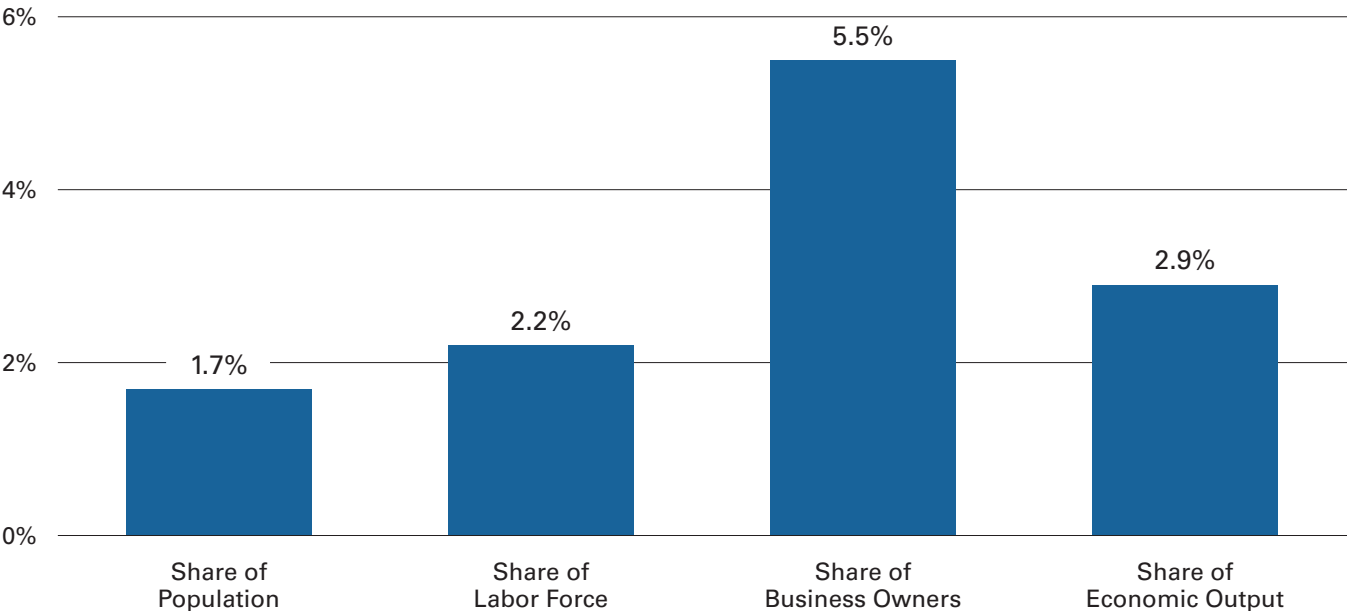
On average, West Virginia's immigrants are slightly older than native born West Virginians. The average age of immigrants in West Virginia is 43.7 years, compared to 40.9 years for native born. Children under the age of 18 make up 20.7 percent of the state's native-born population, but only 7.2 percent of its immigrants. One factor at play here is when the children of immigrants are born in the United States, those children are not considered immigrants.

Economic Contributions

Immigrants' economic contributions exceed their share of the state's population. While comprising just 1.7 percent of West Virginians, they accounted for 2.2 percent of the state's labor force, 5.5 percent of business owners and 2.9 percent of economic output, or state gross domestic product (**Figure 4**).

Figure 4

Economic Contributions of West Virginia Immigrants Exceed Their Share of Population



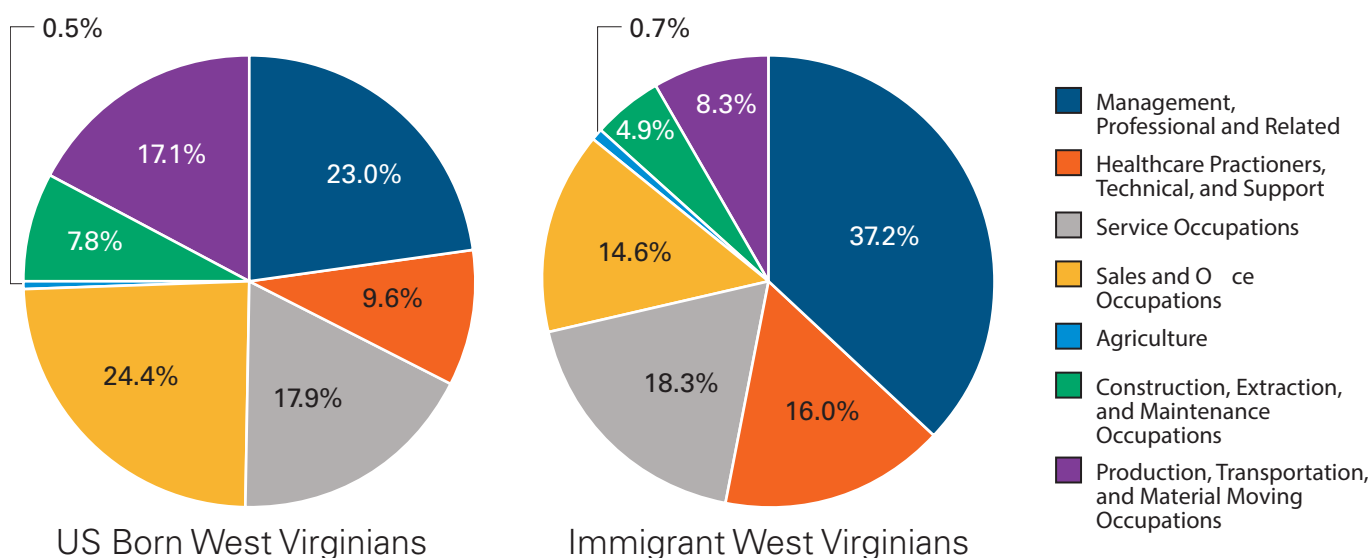
Source: Fiscal Policy Institute analysis of 2015 American Community Survey data

Immigrants' overrepresentation in the state's workforce can partially be attributed to the fact that immigrants tend to be adults who come to the United States to work. In 2017, a much larger share of West Virginia immigrants were of prime working age (25-54) than the share of U.S. born West Virginians, 51.0 percent compared to 37.3 percent. Again, this points to the fact that immigrants are older on average than native born West Virginians, and the fact that the children of immigrants are often not immigrants themselves.

The jobs that immigrants do in West Virginia are diverse and spread across occupation types, with immigrants underrepresented in some areas and overrepresented in others. More immigrants work in white collar professional and healthcare jobs and fewer in blue collar construction and production jobs than native born West Virginians (**Figure 5**).

Figure 5

West Virginia Immigrants Represented Across Occupations



Source: WVCBP analysis of 2017 5-year American Community Survey microdata

The top occupations for immigrants represent both high-skilled and high-wage occupations, and low -kill low-wage occupations. The top 5 occupations for immigrants include post-secondary teachers (8.3 percent), physicians and surgeons (5.7 percent), cashiers (2.8 percent), waiters and waitresses (2.7 percent), and cooks (2.5 percent).

Immigrants make up between 0.9 and 3.4 percent of all occupations. So while immigrants are working across the spectrum of jobs in West Virginia, they are not a large portion of any particular occupation category.

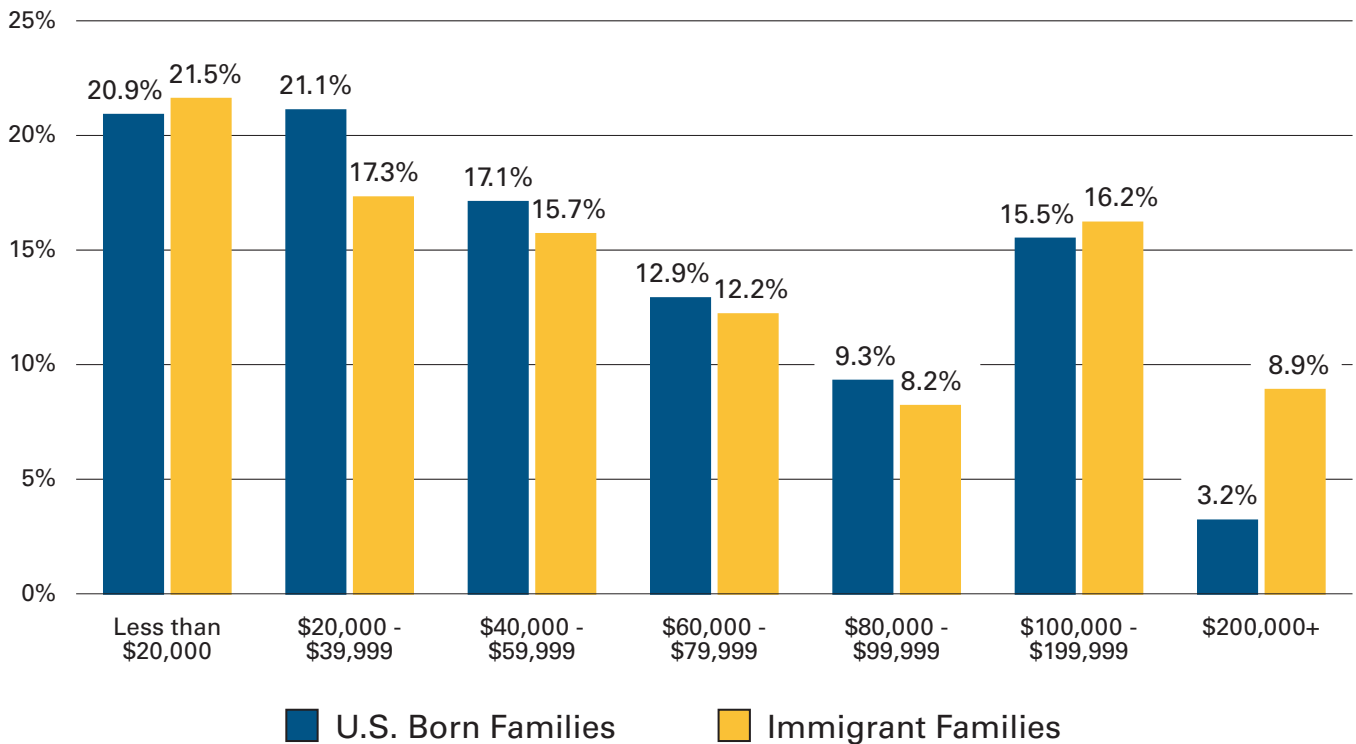
In addition to working in sectors across West Virginia's economy, immigrants contribute to the state through federal, state and local taxes that support education, infrastructure and other economy-boosting public services. While naturalized and other legal immigrants pay taxes just like U.S-born citizens do, many unauthorized immigrants pay significant state and local taxes. They pay sales and excise taxes when they purchase goods and services. They pay property taxes directly on their homes or indirectly as renters. Many undocumented immigrants also pay state income taxes. The best evidence suggests that at least 50 percent of undocumented immigrant households currently file income tax returns using Individual Tax Identification Numbers (ITINs), and many who do not file income tax returns still have taxes deducted from their paychecks. A report from the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy estimates that in 2017, unauthorized immigrants paid \$5.1 million in state and local property, sales and income taxes in West Virginia.²

Incomes

While immigrants are over and underrepresented in specific occupations and industries, they are similarly represented to U.S. born West Virginians across income categories, with the exception of the very top of the income distribution (**Figure 6**)

Figure 6

Income Distribution for West Virginia Immigrant and U.S. Born Families



Source: WVCPB analysis of 2017 5-year American Community Survey microdata

Differences in income for immigrant and U.S. born West Virginians are more apparent on average and at the middle, both the mean and median income for immigrant families was higher than it was for U.S. born families (see table below). This is partly due to the overrepresentation of immigrants in both high wage jobs, such as post-secondary teachers and surgeons, and in low wage service jobs, such as waiters and cooks.

For individual immigrants, mean wage and salary income was also higher than it was for U.S. born West Virginians, by \$11,357. But because top earners skew the income mean upward, and with immigrants overrepresented in top incomes, the median gives a clearer picture of how immigrants fare in West Virginia on average; median wage and salary income for immigrants was \$396 less than it was for U.S. born workers.

Table 1

Mean and Median Income For Families and Individuals in West Virginia

	Median Family Income	Mean Family Income	Median Individual Wage and Salary Income	Mean Individual Wage and Salary Income
Immigrant	\$61,297	\$88,483	\$28,596	\$49,846
U.S. Born	\$49,770	\$65,042	\$28,992	\$38,489
Difference	\$11,527	\$23,441	-\$396	\$11,357

Source: WVCPB analysis of 2017 5-year American Community Survey microdata

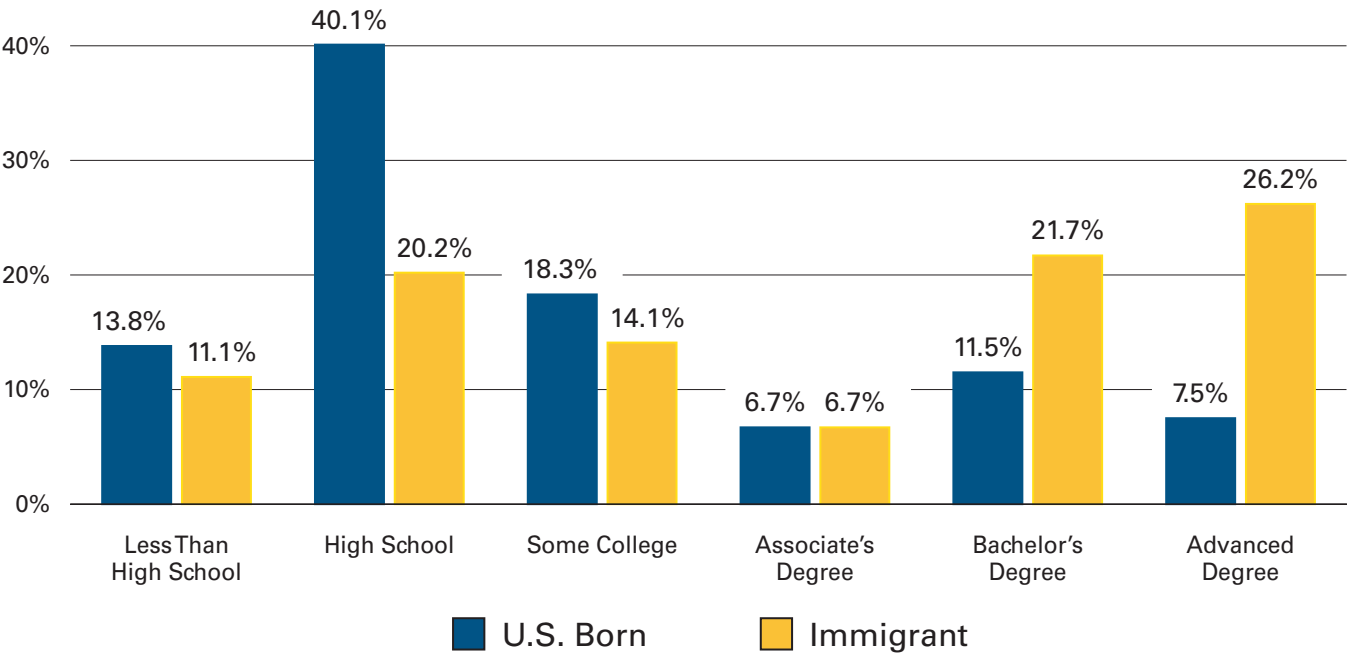
Because some immigrant workers are undocumented, they may receive wages “under the table” that are below the federal minimum wage.³ Also, the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) exempts from the minimum wage farm workers, some domestic employees and other positions where immigrants may be overrepresented. Even in FLSA-protected jobs in food service and other hospitality industries—again, where immigrants are overrepresented—many tipped workers experience wage theft.⁴ Any workers in these jobs are more likely to see wage violations and low pay, and immigrants are disproportionately represented in these jobs.

Poverty rates for the two groups show that despite their relatively high mean family income, immigrants in West Virginia are just as likely to struggle to meet basic needs. 18.4 percent of immigrants lived in poverty in 2017 compared to 17.7 percent of U.S. born West Virginians. Despite similar poverty rates to U.S. born West Virginians, immigrants are less likely to receive public benefits. For example, 19.8 percent of U.S. born West Virginians live in a household with a SNAP or food stamp recipient, compared to just 8.0 percent of immigrants. This is partially due to the fact that many immigrants are ineligible for many public benefits. For example, undocumented immigrants are not eligible for food stamps, and lawfully residing adults are only eligible after they have been in the U.S. in a specified “qualified” immigrant status for five years.⁵

Education

As a whole West Virginia’s immigrants are much more highly educated than U.S. born West Virginians. The share of adults 25 and older with a bachelor’s degree is 10 percentage points higher for the state’s immigrants, while it is nearly 20 percentage points higher for those with an advanced degree. And the share of immigrants with a high school degree is 20 percentage points lower than it is for U.S. born West Virginians (**Figure 7**). This reflects the overrepresentation of immigrants in several occupations that require high levels of education, including post-secondary teachers, and physicians and surgeons.

Figure 7
Educational Attainment, Adults 25 Years and Older, in West Virginia



Source: WVCBP analysis of 2017 5-year American Community Survey microdata

Immigrants in West Virginia sometimes see less of a return on education than native born West Virginians. Median wages for immigrants in West Virginia with some college, an associate's degree, or a bachelor's degree are all lower than native born West Virginians. However, median wages for those with an advanced degree are higher, as well as for those with a high school degree or less.

Table 2

Median Wage and Salary Income By Education Level, All Workers

	Less than High School	High School	Some College	Associates	Bachelors	Advanced Degree
Immigrant	\$18,526	\$25,333	\$14,150	\$33,237	\$33,094	\$57,872
U.S. Born	\$13,460	\$21,537	\$22,000	\$34,377	\$41,873	\$53,663
Difference	\$5,066	\$3,796	-\$7,850	-\$1,140	-\$8,779	\$4,209

Source: WVCPB analysis of 2017 5-year American Community Survey microdata

Citizenship status

Census data show that naturalized immigrants—foreign born people who have become U.S. citizens—are economically better off than non-citizen immigrants (legal residents, refugees and undocumented immigrants). For instance, the poverty rate in West Virginia for citizen immigrants is 9.2 percent and for non-citizen immigrants, 28.7 percent (for all immigrants, 18.4 percent). Overall poverty in West Virginia is 20.6 percent.⁶

A fuller statistical analysis that holds all else equal—age, number of years in the U.S. and other factors that affect economic security—is necessary to estimate the exact size of the effect of citizenship in West Virginia. However, a 2010 national study by the Economic Policy Institute finds that when demographic factors are held constant, the average family income for naturalized immigrants is 14.6 percent higher than for non-citizen immigrants, and the poverty rate is three percentage points lower.⁷

SECTION 2

West Virginia — Like America — Has Been Evolving from the Start

A Legend

It is said that in the Middle Ages, a group of Zoroastrians, known as Farsis, were persecuted for their adherence to their ancient Persian faith. When their leaders approached Hindu ruler Jadi Rana and asked for permission to migrate, he listened sympathetically, but pointed to a full vessel of milk, saying that, like it, his country was full.

One of the Zoroastrian leaders took a pinch of sugar and put it in the milk, indicating that they would not flood the country, but would rather contribute to its flavor.

To his credit, Jadi Rana relented. The Zoroastrians were allowed to enter the land and are still contributing to Indian society.

The same could be said of the many immigrants from around the world who made West Virginia their home.

Nothing New

Human beings have always been on the move. While our migrations are not as seasonable or predictable as those of birds and other animals, mobility has been a historical constant and a creative force in the development of culture, science, technology, ideas, and daily life.

Sometimes, mobility is driven by push factors, such as the desire to escape poverty or oppression; sometimes, pull factors, such as the search for greener pastures, predominate.

People have been arriving in or departing from what is now West Virginia for around 12,000 years, beginning with the arrival of a group known as Paleo-Indians, a highly mobile society of hunters in a much colder world. Over the next several thousand years, numerous communities passed through or settled here, some building huge burial mounds and others leaving little or no footprint. According to the West Virginia Encyclopedia, archaeologists have identified different living patterns over nine distinct periods over the millennia.⁸

Little details are now known about many of those groups, their languages, social customs, relations with other groups, much less how they would identify themselves or the continuity of populations through time. No doubt their relations to each other was characterized by a mixture, of communication, cooperation, trade, and conflict.

It's safe to say that there was cultural diversity, exchange, movement and migration in the region thousands of years before European settlers would arrive.

Colonies, Conflict and Displacement

The earliest Europeans in the area came from Germany and the British Isles in the early 1700s and established settlements near Shepherdstown in what is now Jefferson County and the Greenbrier valley farther south. Their numbers soon grew and expanded westward. Some brought with them involuntary immigrants from Africa as slaves.

British land claims and expansion put strains on indigenous groups. In the post-Colombian era, the groups most closely associated with the area in the early period of contact were “the Shawnee, Delaware, and Cherokee, as well as Iroquoian-speaking groups including the Seneca, Tuscarawas, Susquehannock, and Mingo.”⁹

The native population was sparse when settlers arrived, probably due to aggression from and diseases brought by Europeans, as well as conflicts with other indigenous populations that were likely exacerbated by European contact. Still, they put up a strong resistance to displacement.

Violent conflict between Indians and European settlers in what was then western Virginia was frequent in the 1700s, mostly along the western edge of settlement near the Ohio River, where Indians forged an alliance with French trappers and traders.

According to the West Virginia Encyclopedia, “From the beginning, most Indians northwest of the Ohio River favored France, whose interests in the fur trade posed little threat to Indian land or ways of life. On the other hand, English settlements and agricultural pursuits were a danger that must be resisted.”¹⁰

With a little help from a young Virginia officer named George Washington, the contest over control of the region led to what is commonly called the French and Indian War of 1754-1763, which eventually became something like a world war when it spread back across the Atlantic and came to be known as the Seven Years War.

The defeat of the French and their Indian allies opened the way for further European expansion westward, although conflicts and raids along the Ohio River continued through most of the 1700s.

Today, the state has no federally recognized Indian tribes or lands. In the 2010 Census, 3,787 people were listed as American Indian and Alaska Native. An additional 9,527 were identified as being American Indian, Alaska Native in combination with one or more other races. Given the unfortunate history of the region, many of these individuals may have moved to West Virginia from other states.¹¹

Filling a Young State

The Census Bureau estimates the population of what would become West Virginia to have been 55,873 in 1790. It nearly doubled in 1810 to 105,469. By 1840, it reached 224,537. In the last Census before statehood, the future state's population was 376,688.¹²

In the post-Civil War era, the nation's industrial might was growing, and West Virginia's resources and labor were destined to play a major role in the process.

The new state was hungry for labor, and much of that need would have to be met by fresh waves of immigrants, often actively sought for by state leaders.

One of the first act of the newly formed government of West Virginia was the appointment in 1864 of Joseph Diss Debar, himself an immigrant from France, as commissioner of immigration to encourage newcomers. Something of an artist, he is perhaps best known for designing the state seal.

In 1870, he published the West Virginia Hand Book and Immigrant's Guide. Diss Debar's efforts would eventually be far surpassed by agents from coal and timber companies who scoured Europe, often painting a rosy picture of life in the Mountain State.¹³

By 1870, Census counted 442,014 residents. Of these, 17,980 were African American. The ethnic composition of the remainder had been still predominantly from the British Isles or Germany. That would soon change as industries from rail to timber to steel to coal clamored for workers. West Virginia's population would more than double the 1870 level by 1900, triple it by 1920, and nearly quadruple it by 1930.¹⁴

Some of that increase was caused by the internal migration of many more African Americans from the south to work in the mines. While discrimination persisted in education and most public accommodations, the state did all voting rights. In the southern coalfields between 1900 and 1930, they accounted for 20-26 percent of miners. West Virginia's African American population peaked at 117,754 in 1940.¹⁵

By far the largest numbers came from Europe. In the words of historian and longtime journalist James E. Casto,

*Over the decades, countless Italians, Poles, Serbs, and Turks were put to work building railroads, cutting timber, and running sawmills. Other industries, too, benefitted from immigrant labor. Even before the Civil War, German and Swiss immigrants traveling up the Mississippi and Ohio rivers found jobs in the iron works located in the Wheeling/Weirton area. English and Belgian craftsmen were recruited to work in the state's glass factories. Germans came to brew beer. Talented Italian stonemasons crafted fine homes, buildings, and walls, many of which can still be seen.*¹⁶

As Ken Fones-Wolf and Ronald L. Lewis wrote in *Transnational West Virginia: Ethnic Communities and Economic Change, 1840-1940*, probably the most complete single source on this issue, "In sum, it was the skills and the labor of these migrants that made modern West Virginia."¹⁷

It didn't always go well for the newcomers. Some agents were deceitful and greedy. Some new arrivals were kept in virtual peonage or wound up working and living in appalling conditions. Of course, it was the coal mines that would be the biggest consumer of immigrant labor—and sometimes lives.

A 1911 report to Congress breaks down mine employment by ethnicity in detail for the Fairmont and Elk Garden, New River and Kanawha, and Pocahontas coalfields. Aside from native born Americans of European and African origin, among the "races" of immigrants identified as working in the mines in the early years of the new century are, in no particular order and using the original spelling contemporary spelling:

Russian Hebrew, Hebrew other than Russian, Italians, Poles, Slovaks, Russians, Magyars (Hungarians), Slavish, Lithuanian, English, German, Litvich, Greek, Welsh, Irish, Scotch, Swedish, Belgian, Danish, Syrian, Bohemian, Bulgarian, Austrian, Slovenian, Ruthenian, Montenegrin, Herzegovinian, Dutch, Macedonian, other Slav races, and other southern or eastern European races.¹⁸

The use of the term "race" in the report is instructive. While today the word is associated with skin color, in earlier times it was applied to ethnicities, nationalities, and sometimes families. People of European descent then typically would identify themselves in other terms than "white," just as no pre-Columbian residents of the continent would define themselves as "Indians" or "Native Americans."

It took decades for these diverse groups to become, i.e. self-identify as "white"—and often that process was often defined in opposition to the freedom struggles of African Americans and other people of color. Even a cursory view of history demonstrates that race is, indeed, socially defined and constructed.¹⁹

Like those who accompanied the children of Israel in the Exodus (12:38), the builders of West Virginia were "a mixed multitude."

It should be noted, however, that the motivations of industry recruiters were not entirely innocent. Mine owners hoped that such diversity, aided by prejudice and mistrust, would prevent miners from uniting

across “racial” and ethnic lines and frustrate the organizing efforts of the United Mine Workers.

Fortunately, they were wrong.

In their 1985 book, *Blacks in Appalachia*, William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell quote a 1943 paper by H.R. Northrup titled “The Negro and the United Mine Workers of America:”

*“Negroes are usually well-represented among the local and district officers and in some cases have been elected local union presidents even though white miners are in the majority. In many mines where there are a large number of foreign-born workmen, it is the custom to elect on a three-man pit committee one from this group, one native white, and one Negro. By such means, the UMW has been able to weld into a united front that conglomerate mixture of races and nationalities which many coal operators once thought was an insurmountable bar to unionism.”*²⁰

This example of solidarity overcoming prejudice is a beacon for our time.

Opening the Doors

The next chapter in the history of immigration in West Virginia happened decades after the early waves of the 20th century, even as the state’s population began its long decline.

If one looks at the rather exhaustive list of the nationalities of coal miners identified above, it doesn’t take long to realize who isn’t there: immigrants from Asia, Africa and most of the Middle East.

For much of US history, immigration policy had been heavily racialized. In the earliest years of the republic, naturalization was only available to “free white persons” of good character who resided in the country for five years.²¹

In 1870, Congress expanded—and limited—eligibility to “aliens being free white persons, and to aliens of African nativity and to persons of African descent,” with the latter category intended to refer to former slaves who survived the journey to America. Although access to naturalization was still limited, this did represent an expansion of eligibility.²²

In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which included a provision that “hereafter no State court or court of the United States shall admit Chinese to citizenship; and all laws in conflict with this act are hereby repealed.”²³

Anti-Chinese hysteria in California and the west, often expressed as fear of the “yellow peril,” grew in inverse proportion to the demand for their labor on the railroads. The famous 19th century journalist Horace Greeley (1811-1872), portrayed these Asian migrants as the “bad hombres” of their day: “The Chinese are uncivilized, unclean, and filthy beyond all conception without any of the higher domestic or social relations; lustful and sensual in their dispositions; every female is a prostitute of the basest order.”²⁴

(Similar things had been said about the Irish a few decades before.)

In 1917, Congress passed another immigration law that excluded from naturalization any person from nations in or adjacent to Asia not owned by the United States (this may have opened a window of sorts to Filipinos, then under US control). It also excluded idiots, imbeciles, epileptics, alcoholics, poor, criminals, beggars, any person suffering attacks of insanity, those with tuberculosis, and those who have any form of dangerous contagious disease.²⁵

The US Supreme Court upheld the discrimination on more than one occasion. In one particularly interesting 1923 case, *Bhagat Singh Thind*, a Hindu high caste native of India, sued for naturalization under the existing

laws, claiming Caucasian status. The rationale for his appeal was based on the shared ancient ancestry of Indo-European peoples whose descendants would spread through Europe, Persia and much of India. It didn't work.²⁶

The 1924 Immigration Act imposed quotas based on national origin for Europeans, but completely excluded Asians, and was perceived at the time to be especially targeted to Japanese migrants.²⁷ It is one of the many ironies of history that yesterday's "yellow peril" has sometimes been called today's "model minority."²⁸

That long story of arbitrary exclusion only came to an end in 1965 with the passage of the federal Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the Hart-Celler Act. At the time he signed the bill, President Lyndon B. Johnson said, "it does repair a very deep and painful flaw in the fabric of American justice. It corrects a cruel and enduring wrong in the conduct of the American Nation."²⁹

Johnson noted that under the old system, three countries (all European), were allowed to supply 70 percent of all immigrants. By 2010, nine out of ten would be coming from other parts of the world.³⁰

If the earlier European wave of immigrants would build much of the state's economic base, more recent arrivals from other homelands would provide needed talents and services in many fields, ranging from medicine and surgery to higher education to engineering to basic services.

SECTION 3

Historical and Recent Anti-Immigration Policies are Harmful to West Virginia Families and Communities

Although West Virginia residents have greatly benefitted by the more or less recent arrival of immigrants from whatever source, for the last several years national and some state politicians have played on anxieties and fanned the flames of anti-immigrant hysteria.

This is nothing new in American history.

As early as 1798, in the wake of anxieties about the French Revolution, Congress passed four pieces of legislation that came to be known as the Alien and Sedition Acts, which raised residency requirements for citizenship, allowed for the arrest, imprisonment and deportation of foreign-born US residents and tightened restrictions on free speech.³¹

The legislation proved to be deeply unpopular and contributed to the defeat of President John Adams, who signed the legislation.

The mid 1800s saw the rise of the anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant (and aptly named) Know Nothing or American Party. The former got its name from a policy that urged members to say they knew nothing about nativist political movements. The party called for immigration restrictions, excluding the foreign-born from voting or holding public office, and a 21-year residency requirement for citizenship.³²

It also supported deportation of foreign beggars and criminals; mandatory Bible reading in schools; and banning Roman Catholics from holding public office. According to The Smithsonian, “They wanted to restore their vision of what America should look like with temperance, Protestantism, self-reliance, with American nationality and work ethic enshrined as the nation’s highest values.”³³

The movement experienced considerable if temporary political success.

Abraham Lincoln in 1855 delivered a scathing assessment of the movement:

I am not a Know-Nothing. That is certain. How could I be? How can any one who abhors the oppression of negroes, be in favor of degrading classes of white people? Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation, we begin by declaring that “all men are created equal.” We now practically read it “all men are created equal, except negroes.” When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read “all men are created equal, except negroes, and foreigners, and catholics.” When it comes to this I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretence of loving liberty—to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocrisy.”³⁴

As was mentioned before, this craze was followed a few decades later by fears of the “Yellow Peril.” Around World War I and the 1917 Russian Revolution, there was a new crackdown on “unreliable” US residents of foreign birth.

In the wake of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States government infamously interred 120,000 Japanese Americans, many of whom lost homes, property and other assets.³⁵

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, many Muslims and/or people who were—or appeared to be—of Middle Eastern descent were targeted for harassment, surveillance and more.

In some cases, people driven to migrate to the US do so due to push factors caused by the actions of our government. For example, the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) enjoyed bipartisan support and promised shared prosperity for all involved. One result was the loss of two million jobs in Mexico's agricultural sector.³⁶

Many migrants and refugees from Central American nations such as Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras, attempted to escape the after effects of US intervention in the region. Similarly, many people have sought or are seeking refugee status in the US and elsewhere as a direct or indirect consequence of American military intervention in the Middle East.³⁷

If there's a pattern in the historical parade of migrant-bashing, it is this: such movements and actions seem shameful in retrospect.

From Rhetoric to Reality

In recent years, anti-immigrant fervor has moved from rhetoric to public policy, due largely to the election of Donald Trump in 2016. At the federal level, these have included, but are not limited to:

- the proposed building of a border wall;
- threats to the Temporary Protected Status of people from designated countries experiencing violence or natural disasters;
- attempts to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which allows young people brought to the US as children to apply for a renewable two year period of deferred action on deportation and permission to work;
- separation of families of migrants and refugees, including mass detention of children;
- reducing the number of refugees allowed admission to the US;
- issuing an executive order limiting travel from several, predominantly Muslim countries;
- issuing an executive order enhancing the ability of governors and local officials to restrict refugee resettlement; and
- aggressive roundups of suspected undocumented migrants conducted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The West Virginia legislature has followed suit, proposing and nearly enacting legislation that would require state and local law enforcement to collaborate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); ramped up surveillance on refugees and required them to disclose personal information; and given the governor and local governments power to block refugee resettlement in the state.³⁸ More such legislation can be expected.

Unfortunately, such views enjoy some public support. According to a West Virginia 2018 poll, 62 percent believe that “a growing number of newcomers from other countries threatens traditional American customs and values,” compared with 38 percent who said that “growing number of newcomers from other countries strengthens American society.” However, phrasing of the question may have impacted the results.

Despite the economic evidence to the contrary cited above, the poll found that 61 percent believed “immigrants

today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs, housing and healthcare,” compared with 39 percent who said that immigrants “strengthen our country because of their hard work and talents.”³⁹

The survey found that anti-immigrant attitudes were most common among older residents and those with lower educational attainment.

These numbers reflect the need for increased public education on the issue. One statistic alone illustrates the difference between perceptions and realities regarding the contributions of immigrants. In West Virginia, doctors from six Muslim countries targeted by the Trump travel ban (Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen) provide 210,000 appointments for year.⁴⁰

All this has created a climate of fear in much of West Virginia’s small immigrant communities, which are widely distributed across a rural state. Immigrants may often feel isolated, visible and vulnerable to hostility and official harassment, particularly from ICE raids, which proportionately have hit West Virginia harder than any other state. ICE arrested 1,727 migrants between November 2014 and May 2018. Given their relative isolation, such migrants may not know about or be comfortable in exercising their legal rights.⁴¹

Undocumented immigrants in West Virginia are 7.7 times more likely to be arrested by ICE than in the US as a whole. They are 23 times more likely to be arrested here than Massachusetts, and twice as likely to be arrested here as South Dakota, the second most dangerous state.⁴²

Given the many unmet needs in the state, it is arguable that federal resources could be put to better use than terrorizing waiters and dishwashers at rural West Virginia Mexican restaurants.

West Virginia at the Crossroads

In 1950, the US population was over 1,50 million. West Virginia’s population that year reached its all-time high of slightly over 2 million.⁴³

Fast forward to 2019. The US population has more than doubled from the 1950 level to over 329 million. West Virginia’s population has declined by around 200,000 over the same period. A 2002 analysis by the West Virginia Health Statistics Center found that, if nobody had either moved into, nor out of, West Virginia for the 50 years between 1950 and 2000, the normal rate of population increase would have resulted in a state with 2,605,345 residents.⁴⁴ That number would have been much higher today.

The state and its communities are facing some serious demographic problems:

- West Virginia is among the oldest states in terms of median age.⁴⁵
- It has the lowest workforce participation rate, which hovers around 50 percent of its eligible population. The national average is around 63 percent.⁴⁶
- As of Dec. 2017, 73,879 West Virginians of all ages received Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI) for a disability.⁴⁷
- By 2018, 26.3 percent of West Virginians, or 475,744 individuals, received Social Security or Social Security Disability Insurance.⁴⁸
- Between 2010 and 2018, there were 19,000 more deaths than births.⁴⁹
- According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, West Virginia has the highest age adjusted death rate from opioid overdoses.⁵⁰
- Between July 1, 2017 and July 1, 2018, the state lost 11,216 people, a rate of over 30 people per day.⁵¹
- Public school enrollment declined by 4,122 students in the last year.⁵²

These trends indicate a serious downward spiral. If not reversed, they could spell a more or less slow death to West Virginia's communities. To thrive—or even to survive—West Virginia needs to be, and be seen as, a welcoming place for new arrivals from around the world.

West Virginians have done this before under tough conditions in the days of industrialization, bridging differences and forging bonds of solidarity in ways that enriched our culture and contributed to the world at large. We need to build on that tradition.

SECTION 4

Conclusion: Welcoming Immigrants Can Help West Virginia Get on a Better Path

Both history and current data show that immigrants' contributions to West Virginia are substantial and diverse, and also that citizenship status plays a role in their economic security. A pathway to citizenship could benefit immigrants—and by extension, the communities and economies in which they live and work—in many ways:

- On the federal level, a more streamlined and easier path to citizenship would provide a multitude of benefits. Citizenship provides immigrants with better access to a fuller range of private and public sector jobs, higher education and financial aid options, bank loans, job training programs and more. Citizenship also makes it harder for employers to pay illegal wages to immigrant workers, leveling the playing field for competitors who already play by the rules. A pathway to citizenship could also benefit the economy by increasing population growth in the face of declining population in West Virginia, and by allowing the full legal expression of immigrants' higher rates of entrepreneurship to spur innovation and productivity.
- With more income and fully legal channels through which to pay income taxes, immigrants will pay more taxes. A report from the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy estimates that immigration reform would generate an additional \$1.2 million in state and local tax revenue in West Virginia each year.⁵³ Reform would also bring taxes and public spending into better alignment: immigrants would be eligible for benefits they support with their tax dollars.
- The federal government should also reverse recent administration policies of family separation of people seeking asylum, restrictions on refugee resettlement, and eliminating protections for those covered by Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS).
- Beyond immigration reform, states and local governments can make it easier for legal permanent residents to become citizens by increasing citizenship outreach and application rates among lawful permanent residents, as well as developing effective naturalization outreach and communications plans
- States can boost opportunity for young immigrants by expanding college access. 21 states offer in-state tuition to undocumented students, and 11 states allow access to state financial aid.
- Local governments can also reject harsh enforcement and anti-immigration policies in favor of a more welcoming approach and building more inclusive communities, such as rejecting English Only laws.

Immigrants in West Virginia perform a wide and important range of jobs, contribute to public services, and refresh our state with the new perspectives and outlooks that have always been important to America's identity. It's crucial for the nation to grapple with immigration reform in order to give those West Virginians a fuller chance at a better life.


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