



# The World in a Zip Code: Greater Washington, D.C. as a New Region of Immigration

by Audrey Singer, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Samantha Friedman, Ivan Cheung, and Marie Price, The George Washington University

*“Washington’s  
status as a  
magnet for new  
immigrants is  
a relatively  
new one.”*

## FINDINGS

A study of recent INS data on immigration in the Washington region between 1990 and 1998 reveals that:

- In 1998, the Washington metropolitan area was the 5th most common destination for legal immigrants to the U.S. Only New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami were more popular. Between 1990 and 1998, nearly 250,000 immigrants from 193 countries and territories chose to live in the metropolitan area.
- Washington’s recent immigrants are highly diverse—there is not a dominant country (or countries) of origin among the newcomers to the region. The largest single immigrant group—from El Salvador—comprises only 10.5 percent of the region’s newcomers.
- Washington’s immigrants are not clustered into ethnically homogeneous residential enclaves, but instead are dispersed throughout the region. Of the top ten immigrant zip codes, four each are located in Maryland and Virginia, and two are in the District of Columbia.
- In the 1990s, 87 percent of immigrants to the region chose to live in the suburbs. Almost half (46 percent) of new immigrants located in communities outside the Capital Beltway. Less than 13 percent moved to the District.
- Asian immigrants are more likely to move to the outer suburbs, while Latin American and African immigrants tend to live within the Beltway.

## I. Introduction

The Washington metropolitan area has, over the past decade, become one of the top immigrant destinations in the country, drawing the majority of its newcomers from Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Greater Washington ranks as the 6th largest metropolitan area of immigrant settlement, with over 800,000

foreign-born people living in the region.<sup>1</sup> In 1998, one person in six in the region was foreign-born, a striking contrast to 1970, when one out of every twenty-two residents was foreign-born.<sup>2</sup> According to the latest data available from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, in 1998, the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area ranked



Table 1: Top Ten Immigrant-Receiving Metropolitan Areas, 1998.

Metropolitan Area	Immigrants admitted (from all countries)
New York, NY	82,175
Los Angeles/Long Beach, CA	59,598
Chicago, IL	30,355
Miami, FL	28,853
Washington, DC/MD/VA	24,032
San Francisco, CA	14,540
Oakland, CA	13,437
Houston, TX	13,183
Boston/Lawrence/Lowell/Brockton, MA	12,725
San Jose, CA	12,656

Source: U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1999. Annual Report: Legal Immigration, Fiscal Year 1998.

as the 5th most common destination for immigrants coming to the United States (see Table 1). Several zip codes in the metropolitan area include newcomers from over 130 countries.

Washington's status as a magnet for new immigrants is a relatively new one. Unlike other large immigrant gateway cities, Greater Washington is not built upon a rich history of immigration. Instead, the region began to be a destination for newcomers to the United States after World War II, when Washington, D.C. changed from a purely national to an international capital. Thus, there are few long-standing immigrant neighborhoods or enclaves.<sup>3</sup> The absence of these areas bears directly on the settlement of today's new arrivals and also has implications for their social and economic integration and on policies related to immigrants' settlement.<sup>4</sup>

This study documents the settlement patterns of recent immigrants using data from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service from 1990 to 1998. By mapping the location of immigrants by zip code areas and country of origin, our research identifies the settlement patterns of recent

arrivals to the area. Specifically, we document the extent to which immigrants are initially settling in the inner suburbs (within the Capital Beltway) versus the outer suburbs outside the Beltway. Next we examine recent immigrants by region of origin. Lastly, we investigate whether new immigrants are clustering among their co-ethnics<sup>5</sup> or living in a more dispersed pattern.<sup>6</sup>

## II. Methodology

This analysis is based upon administrative data from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) for fiscal years 1990 to 1998. These data represent all immigrants who were admitted as legal permanent residents (LPRs) during the period and who indicated their intended residence to be the Washington metropolitan area, which we define as the following jurisdictions: the District of Columbia; Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William counties and the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas, and Manassas Park in Virginia; and Charles, Frederick, Montgomery, and Prince George's

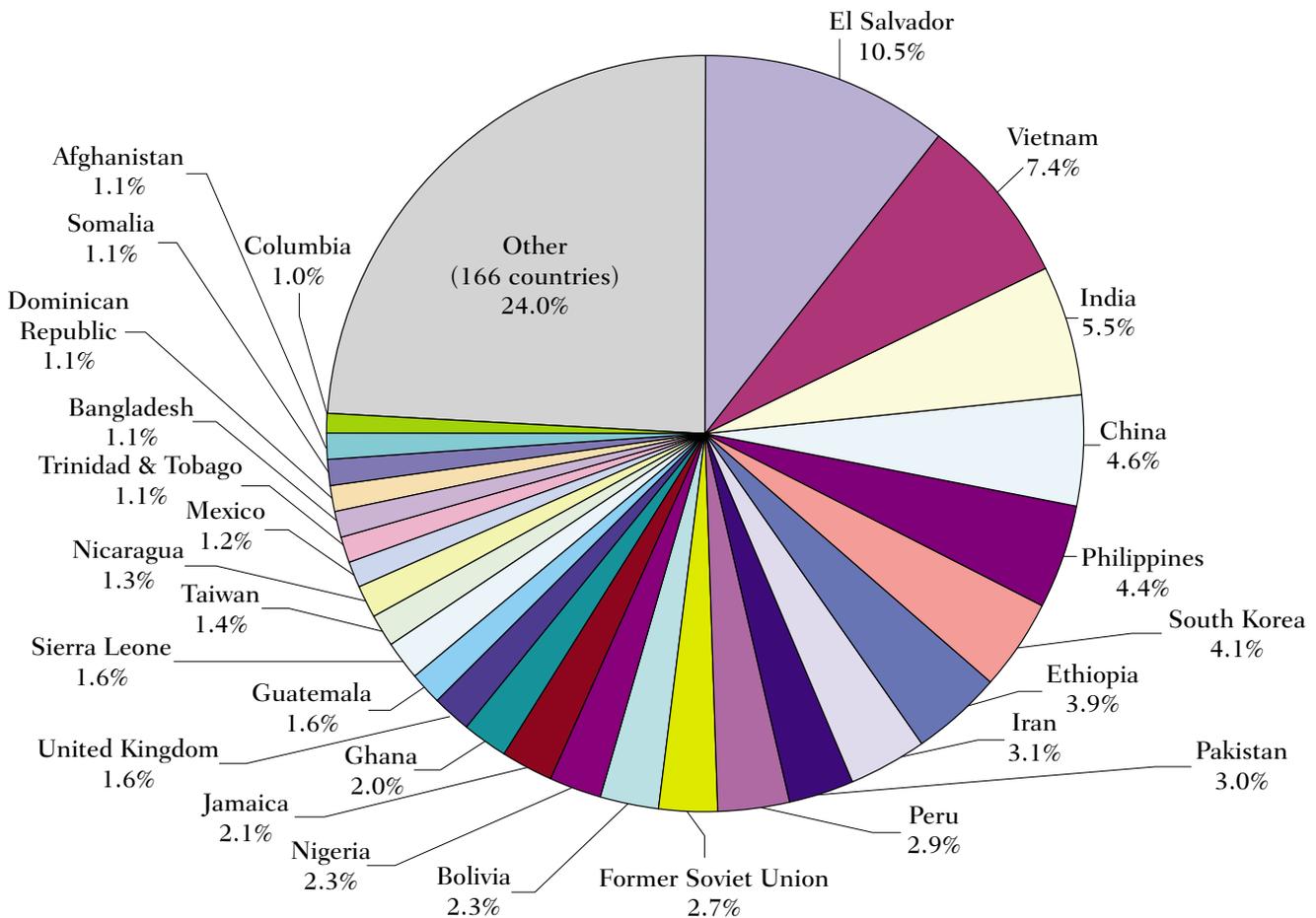
counties in Maryland.<sup>7</sup>

Of the population in our study, 57 percent arrived from outside the United States with a valid immigrant visa. Forty-three percent were already in the United States in a temporary status and adjusted to legal permanent residence after an average period of stay in the United States of three years. Of those who adjusted their status, one-quarter changed from refugee status, and the rest adjusted from so-called *nonimmigrant* visas, such as student, visitor and worker visas.

Thus, these data constitute the flow of *legal* permanent immigrants into the United States, or Green Card recipients. For each legal entrant, the data include a zip code of intended residence, date of arrival, origin country, age, sex, and visa type, but do not include employment status, educational attainment, or household income information. These data also exclude undocumented immigrants, temporary immigrants and immigrants who received legal permanent residence through the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act. We recognize that undocumented immigrants are attracted to and reside in the metropolitan area, although there are no data that exist to identify this population. There is evidence, however, that the residential patterns of the undocumented are similar to the legal immigrant population.<sup>8</sup> Even though a snapshot of the region's immigrant population in the 1990s using the INS data is incomplete, we present the most detailed spatial analysis possible given the limits of data.<sup>9</sup>

We present descriptive statistics about the residential choices of immigrant newcomers to the Washington metropolitan area. We then map immigrants' residential patterns according to their intended place of residence by zip code using Geographic Information Systems (GIS). The use of zip code information for immigrants offers a far more recent rendering of immigrant residential patterns than what is

**Figure 1**  
**Composition of New Immigrants in Washington Metropolitan Area by Country of Origin, 1990–1998**



available from the 1990 census, and gives us a preview of what 2000 census data on foreign-born residents might reveal. However, we note that using zip code level data has several important limitations. The first is that zip codes vary in size, and several included in this analysis have as many as 50,000 people residing within them. The second is that we are unable to identify, within a zip code, where residential clustering may be occurring. Third, zip codes are developed for postal delivery and therefore do not necessarily reflect meaningful community boundaries.

### III. Findings

#### *A. Washington's recent immigrants are highly diverse—there is not a dominant country (or countries) of origin among the newcomers to the region.*

Between 1990 and 1998, nearly one-quarter of a million immigrants from 193 countries and territories chose the Washington metropolitan area as their intended residence. The majority of the newcomers are in their prime working years, and thus are an important supply of new labor. Fully 75 percent are 40 or younger, and the

mean age of the immigrant population is 29. Twenty-five percent of the recent immigrants are under 18 years old. Of these recent arrivals to the metropolitan area, 53 percent are female and 47 percent are male.

Figure 1 and Table 2 show the largest immigrant groups who entered the United States between 1990 and 1998 and chose Greater Washington as their intended residence. Out of the more than 240,000 legal immigrants who came to live in the metropolitan area during the 1990s, about half of them were from the following ten countries: El Salvador, Vietnam, India,

**Table 2: Top Immigrant Groups to the Washington Metropolitan Area, 1990-1998.**

Rank	Country of Origin	Immigrants (90-98)		Number of Zip Code Areas with: <sup>4</sup>		
		Number [a]	% Share <sup>3</sup> [b]	≥ 1 [c]	≥ 100 [d]	≥ 500 immigrants [e]
1	El Salvador	25,263	10.5	185	62	14
2	Vietnam	17,702	7.4	166	42	9
3	India	13,330	5.6	174	51	1
4	China	10,966	4.6	177	31	1
5	Philippines	10,599	4.4	185	34	1
6	South Korea	9,948	4.1	185	26	2
7	Ethiopia <sup>1</sup>	9,381	3.9	147	25	2
8	Iran	7,506	3.1	161	20	0
9	Pakistan	7,165	3.0	164	23	0
10	Peru	7,029	2.9	161	21	0
11	Former Soviet Union <sup>2</sup>	6,391	2.6	178	10	1
12	Bolivia	5,644	2.3	144	12	1
13	Nigeria	5,461	2.2	150	17	0
14	Jamaica	5,082	2.1	153	13	2
15	Ghana	4,764	1.9	146	10	0
16	United Kingdom	3,805	1.5	194	0	0
17	Guatemala	3,774	1.6	157	9	0
18	Sierra Leone	3,750	1.6	126	10	0
19	Taiwan	3,479	1.5	146	4	0
20	Nicaragua	3,103	1.3	132	9	0
21	Mexico	3,004	1.3	162	4	0
22	Trinidad & Tobago	2,747	1.1	155	4	0
23	Bangladesh	2,656	1.1	129	4	0
24	Dominican Republic	2,631	1.1	130	7	0
25	Somalia	2,536	1.1	112	7	0
26	Afghanistan	2,529	1.1	109	6	0
27	Colombia	2,513	1.1	161	1	0

1 Immigrants from Eritrea are included with Ethiopia.

2 Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union include those from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

3 Percentage share based upon the total number of immigrants (total of 193 countries of origin).

4 There are a total of 258 zip code areas in the study area.

Source: U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, Annual Immigrant Files, 1990-1998.

China, the Philippines, South Korea, Ethiopia, Iran, Pakistan and Peru. The 27 individual country groups shown in Figure 1 represent three-quarters of the total number of the immigrants who came to the area during the period. People from the remaining 166 countries account for one-quarter of the new immigrants.

What is noteworthy about the origins of the immigrants that choose

to live in the Washington, D.C. area is the variety of countries and regions from which they originate. Unlike some other major immigrant destinations such as Miami or Los Angeles, where one or two immigrant groups tend to predominate, Washington's flow is diverse. For example, the top ten sending countries are found, literally, all over the map: Central America (El Salvador), South America (Peru),

Southeast Asia (Vietnam and the Philippines), East Asia (China and South Korea), South Asia (India and Pakistan), the Middle East (Iran), and Africa (Ethiopia). The largest single immigrant group is from El Salvador, but this accounts for only 10.5 percent of the area's recent immigrants. Overall, 42.0 percent of recent immigrants came from Asia, 31.5 percent from Latin America and the

**Table 3: Top Ten Immigrant Destination Zip Codes in the Washington Metropolitan Area, 1990-1998**

Rank	Zip Code	Place Name	County & State	Immigrants		Number of Countries	% Foreign Born 1990 Census
				Number	% share of Area Total		
				[a]	[b]	[c]	[d]
1	22204	South Arlington	Arlington, VA	7823	3.3	128	28.3
2	20009	Adams Morgan/Mt. Pleasant	District of Columbia	6534	2.7	136	22.3
3	20783	Langley Park/Hyattsville	Prince George's, MD	5736	2.4	125	36.1
4	20906	Silver Spring/Wheaton	Montgomery, MD	5365	2.2	131	21.9
5	20904	Silver Spring/Colesville	Montgomery, MD	4812	2.0	135	18.7
6	20878	Gaithersburg	Montgomery, MD	4811	2.0	125	17.2
7	22003	Annandale	Fairfax, VA	4731	2.0	118	18.1
8	22304	Landmark	Alexandria, VA	4605	1.9	125	20.7
9	22041	Baileys Crossroads	Fairfax, VA	4526	1.9	117	41.7
10	20011	Petworth/Brightwood Park	District of Columbia	4378	1.8	106	9.6

Source: All data from U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, Annual Immigrant Files, 1990–1998, except for data in column [d], from 1990 U.S. Census Summary Tape File 3B.

Caribbean, 16.2 percent from Africa, and the remaining 10.3 percent from the countries of Europe, Oceania and Canada. The level of immigration from Asia is particularly significant, as Washington emerges as a major East Coast destination for immigrants from that region.

***B. Washington's immigrants are not clustered into ethnically homogeneous residential enclaves, but instead are dispersed throughout the region.***

Of the 258 metropolitan area zip codes in our study, two-thirds had 50 or more new arrivals. Only 23 were not cited as intended areas of residence, and many of these are institutional zip codes (used, for example, by universities), and not ones in which one would expect to find any residents. Table 2 gives an initial indication of the dispersion of immigrants throughout the metropolitan area's 258 zip codes (see columns c–e). For example, Salvadorans were found in 185 zip code areas, 62 of which had

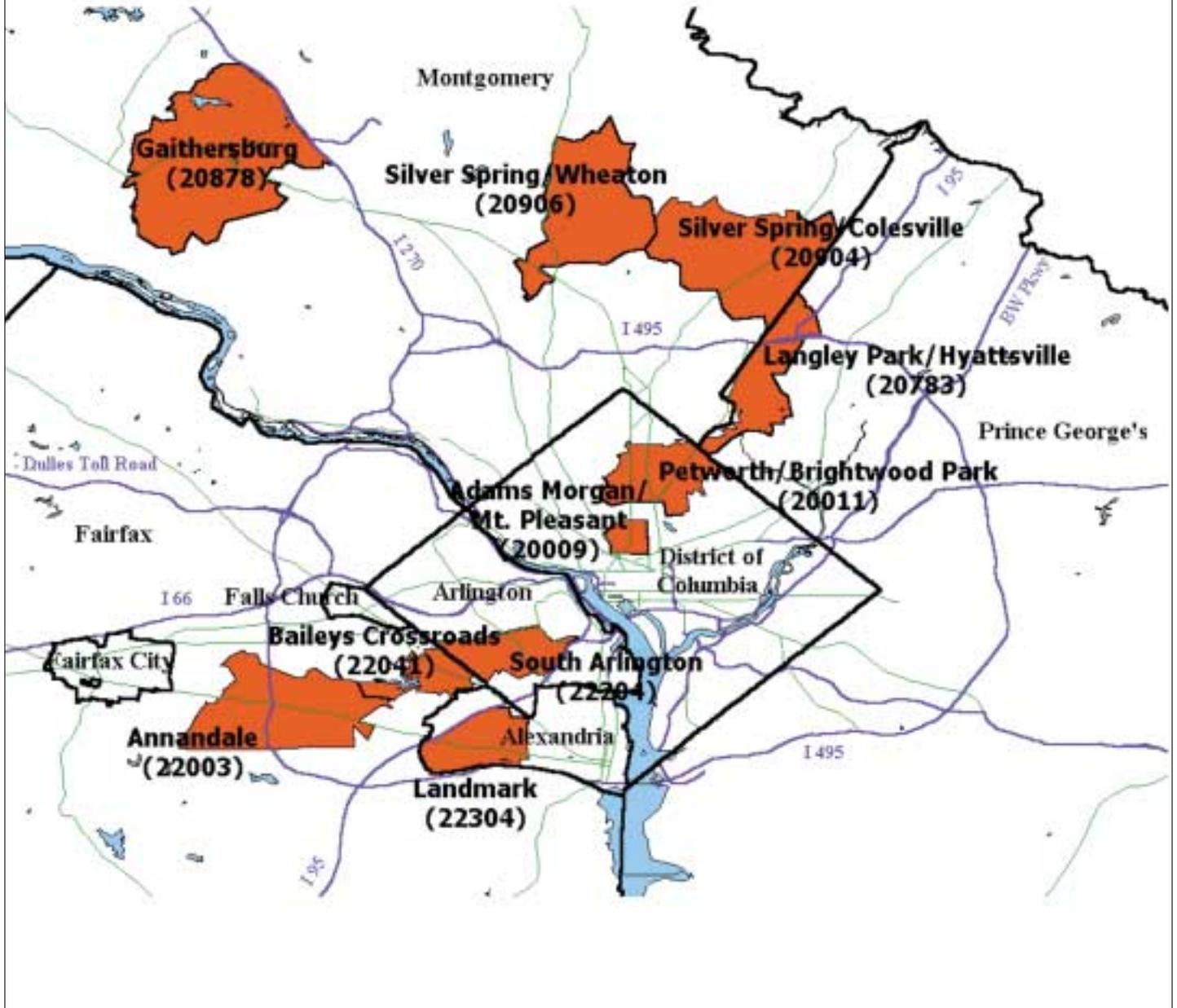
100 or more Salvadoran immigrants. There are also 14 zip code areas with 500 or more recent Salvadoran immigrants. Recent Indian immigrants were located in 174 zip code areas, 51 of which had 100 or more Indians, and only one zip code area had more than 500 Indian immigrants. The results for immigrants from the other 25 country groups show similar patterns of dispersion. What these findings suggest is that immigrants from each country of origin group are not clustering, but instead are scattered throughout the metropolitan area.

The zip code areas that attract high percentages of immigrants are some of the most ethnically diverse locations in the metropolitan area. Within these popular immigrant zip codes, it is common to have over 100 countries of origin represented among newcomers. Table 3 shows the top ten immigrant destinations by zip code. In addition to showing the number of immigrants to the zip code, it shows what percentage they comprise of all recent immigrants to the metropolitan area. For example,

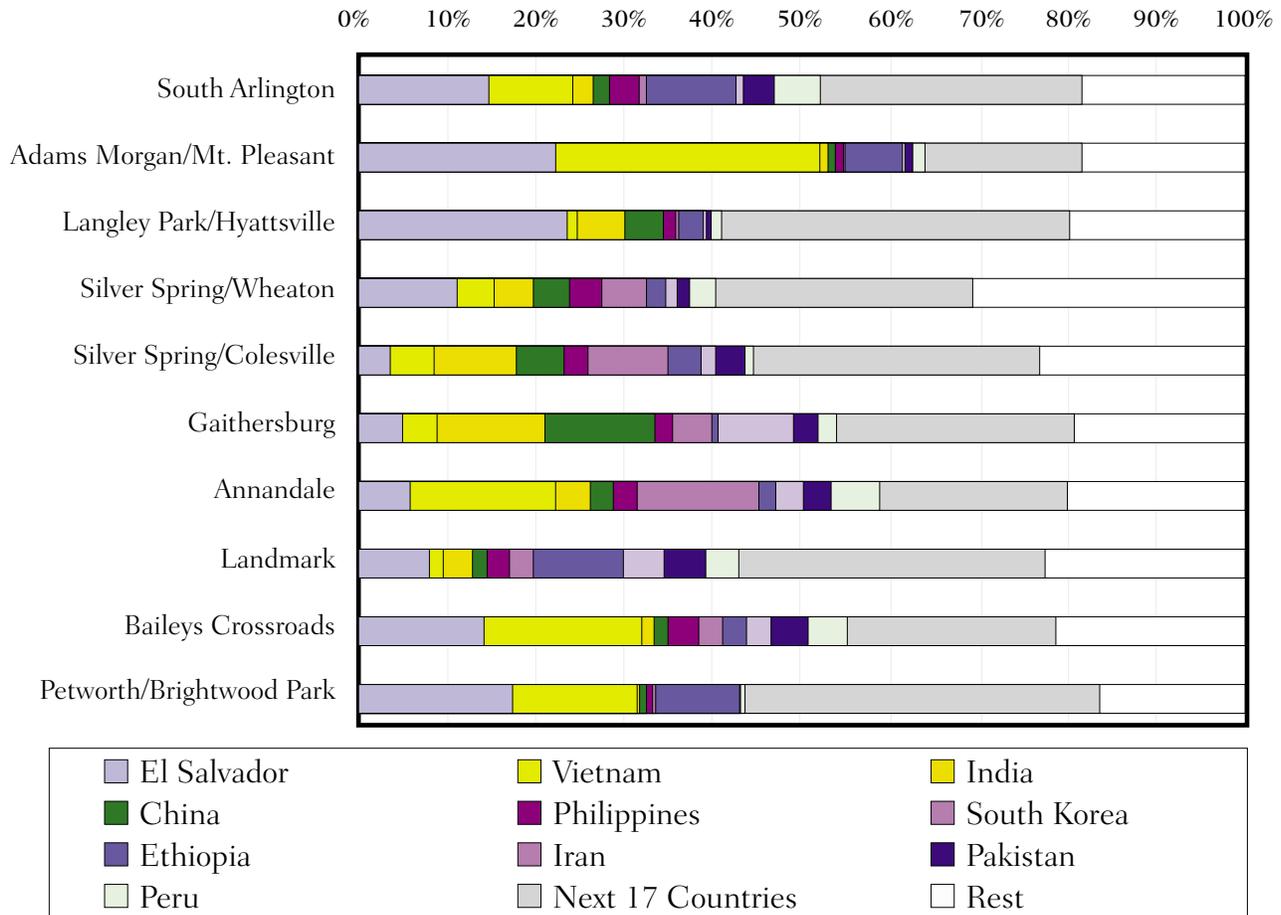
the 7,823 recent immigrants to South Arlington's 22204 represent 3.3 percent of the entire immigrant flow to the Washington metropolitan area. The last column in Table 3 indicates the percentage of foreign-born residents living in the zip code at the time of the 1990 census, which is the "stock" of immigrants who were living in each particular zip code prior to the arrival of the newcomers represented in the INS data. At the high end of the range is 22041 in Bailey's Crossroads/Seven Corners, where more than 41 percent of the residents were foreign-born in 1990. In the District's Petworth area (20011 zip code), fewer than 10 percent of the 1990 residents were foreign-born, marking it as an immigrant destination on the rise.

Of the top ten immigrant zip codes, four each are located in Maryland and Virginia, and two are in the District of Columbia. As Figure 2 shows, three are outside the Beltway, two straddle it and five are inside the Beltway. Montgomery and Fairfax counties contain five of the top-ten zip code areas. Two

Figure 2  
 Top Ten Immigrant Zip Codes in the  
 Washington Metropolitan Area, 1990–1998



**Figure 3**  
**Immigrant Composition of the Top 10 Zip Codes in the Washington Metropolitan Area, 1990–1998**



more are in Arlington and Alexandria, one is in Prince George’s County, and two are in Washington, D.C. The number of recent immigrants arriving to these zip codes in the 1990s ranges from nearly 4,400 to over 7,800. Combined, these ten zip codes account for one-fifth of the area’s new immigrants. This differs from the residential patterns in those metropolitan areas with long-established immigrant communities, such as New York or Chicago, where traditionally immigrants were drawn to the inner city and over time moved to the suburbs.

The South Arlington area along Columbia Pike (22204) is one of the most diverse areas in the metropolitan region, with recent immigrants from 128 countries. Immigrants from the top ten sending countries account for half the newcomers to this zip code, and all of the top ten countries are represented here, with the largest groups from El Salvador, Bolivia, Vietnam and Ethiopia (see Figure 3).<sup>10</sup> The next most popular destination is the Adams Morgan/Mount Pleasant area of the District of Columbia (20009). There, one finds recent

immigrants from 136 countries. But unlike South Arlington, there is a notable clustering of Salvadoran and Vietnamese immigrants. Immigrants from those two countries account for half of the new immigrants to that zip code. None of the other top ten zip code areas has such a high concentration of immigrants from just two countries. In the Gaithersburg/Rockville zip code of 20878, the top ten sending countries account for just over half of the recent immigrants. In this area, the largest numbers come from India,

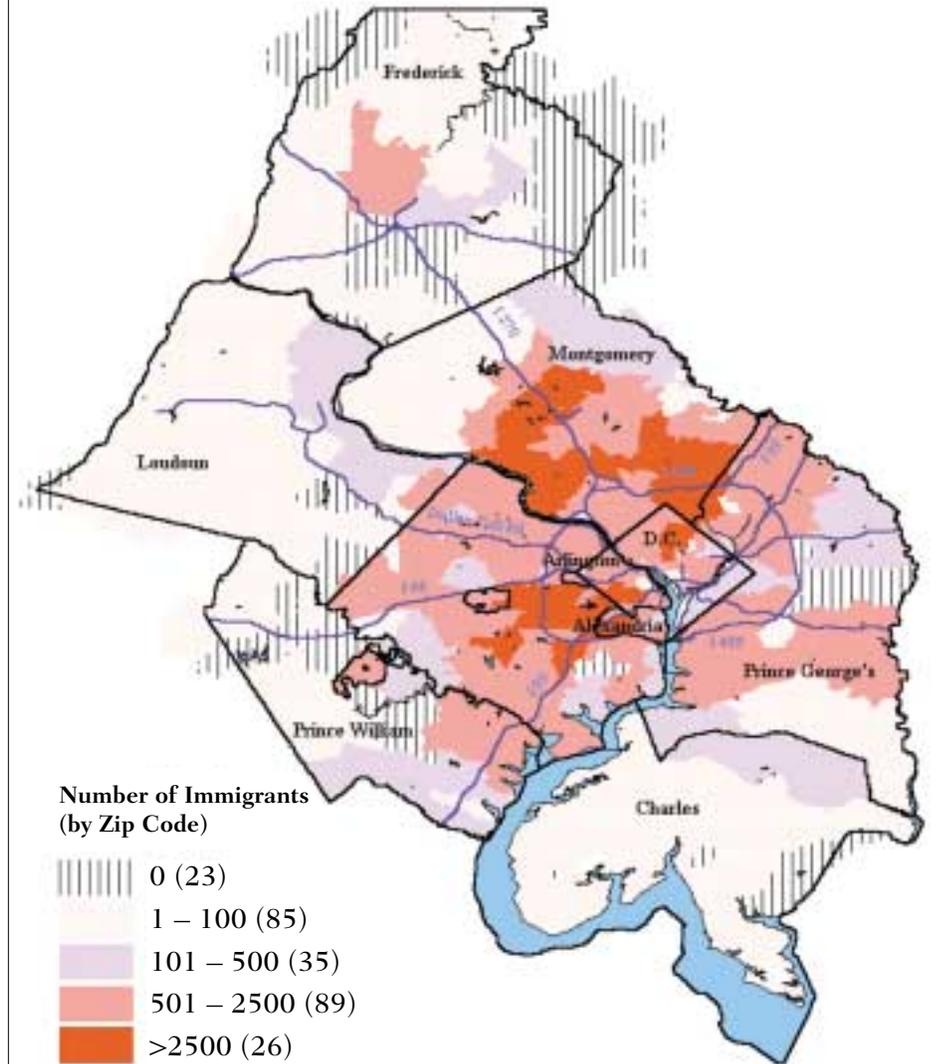
China, Taiwan, and Iran.<sup>11</sup> In the closer-in Maryland suburb of Langley Park/Hyattsville (20783) in Prince George's County, the top ten sending countries only account for 40 percent of the immigrant population, with Salvadorans making up 23 percent of the zip code's recent immigrants.

*C. In the 1990s, 87 percent of the region's new immigrants chose to live in the suburbs, with almost half (46 percent) locating in communities outside the Capital Beltway.* Immigration to the Washington region is an overwhelmingly suburban phenomenon. The two most populous and wealthiest counties in the region were also the top two destinations for new immigrants. Combined, Fairfax and Montgomery counties were the intended residence of 56 percent of the area's new immigrants. Fairfax County, which has a median household income of over \$90,000<sup>12</sup>, was the intended residence of 68,115 new immigrants in the 1990s. Similarly, Maryland's Montgomery County, with a median household income of nearly \$78,000, accounted for 67,491 recent immigrants. Fairfax and Montgomery counties also account for much of the area's job growth—driven by high-tech, construction and service jobs, which have attracted both domestic and international workers with a range of skills.

Immigrants are almost as likely to choose to live in outer suburbs as in inner suburbs (in Washington, the inner and outer suburbs are divided by the Capital Beltway, with the outer suburbs lying beyond the Beltway). Almost half (46 percent) of the recent immigrants to the Washington metropolitan area chose to reside outside the Beltway, many in areas with high concentrations of immigrants such as Silver Spring, Wheaton, Gaithersburg and Annandale (see Figure 4).

Of the within-the-Beltway immigrants, three out of four chose the suburbs of Maryland and Virginia over the District of Columbia.<sup>13</sup> The inner

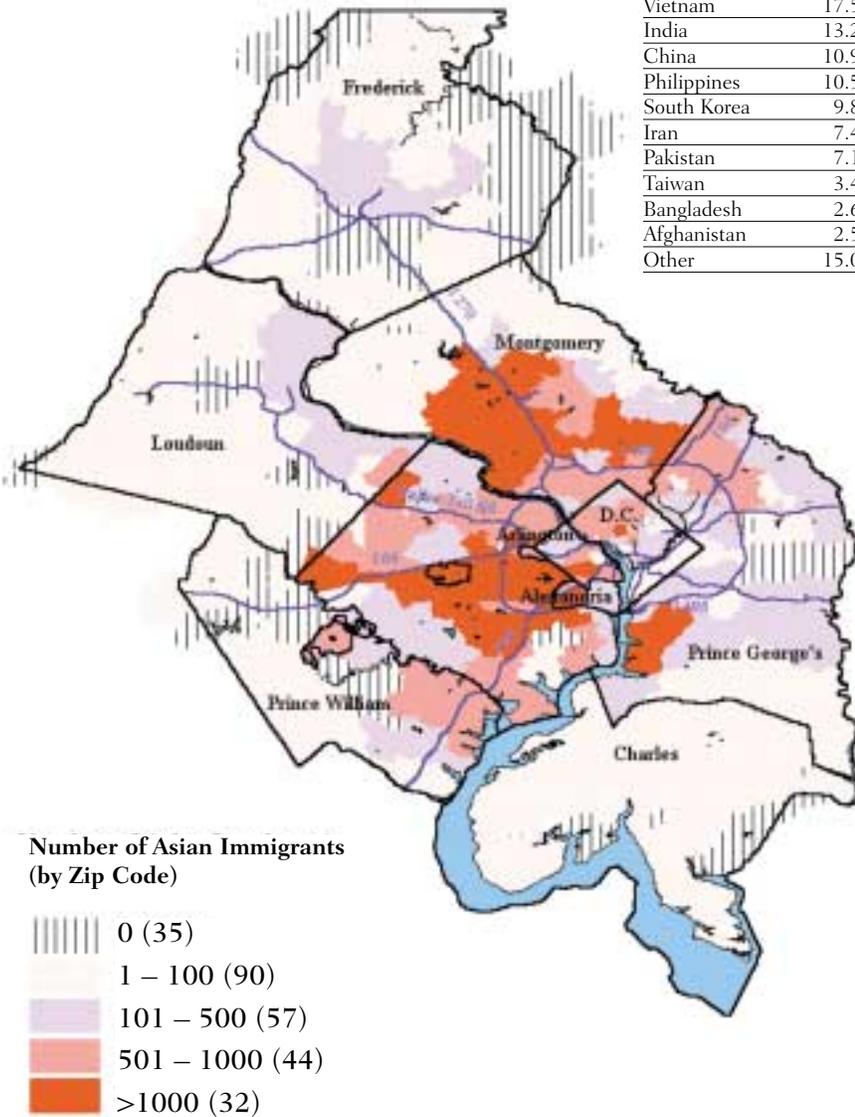
**Figure 4**  
Recent Immigrants to the Washington Metropolitan Area, 1990–1998



**Figure 5**  
**Recent Asian Immigrants to the**  
**Washington Metropolitan Area, 1990–1998**

**Percent of Total Asian Immigrants in Region**

Vietnam	17.5
India	13.2
China	10.9
Philippines	10.5
South Korea	9.8
Iran	7.4
Pakistan	7.1
Taiwan	3.4
Bangladesh	2.6
Afghanistan	2.5
Other	15.0



suburbs of Arlington, Alexandria, Fairfax, Montgomery and Prince George's counties have attracted a large and increasingly diverse immigrant population. As for the District of Columbia, only 12.8 percent of new immigrants opted to reside there during the 1990s.

***D. Different immigrant subgroups have different settlement patterns. Asian immigrants are more likely to move to the outer suburbs, while Latin American and African immigrants tend to live within the Beltway.***

#### **Asian Immigrants**

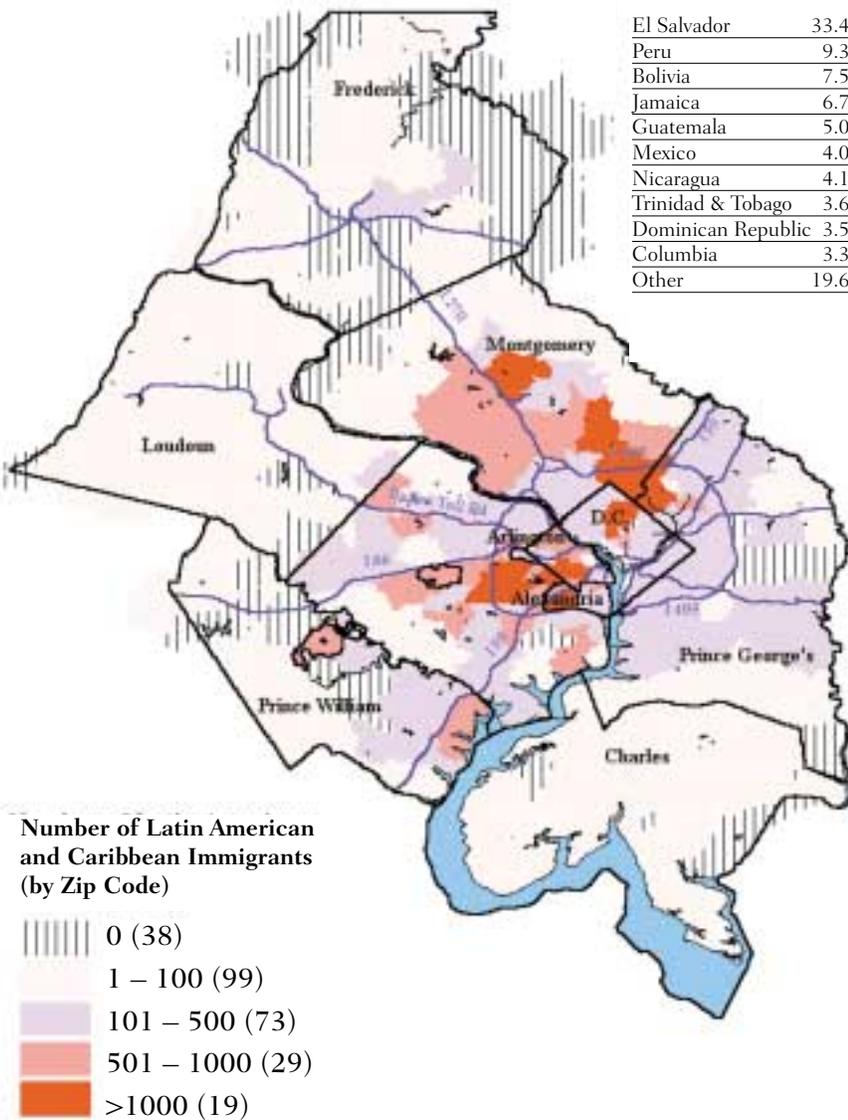
As noted above, Washington is a rising East Coast destination for Asian immigrants. Forty-two percent of the region's immigrants are from Asia, with the majority of these new arrivals from ten countries: Vietnam, India, China, the Philippines, South Korea, Iran, Pakistan, Taiwan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Asian immigrants are the most suburban of the three broad regional origin groups presented, with 56 percent living outside the Beltway (see Figure 5). Of the recent Asian immigrants to the suburbs, the Indian and Chinese immigrants are the most dispersed while Vietnamese and Koreans are more likely to cluster (see [www.brookings.edu/urban](http://www.brookings.edu/urban) for individual country of origin maps).

The Vietnamese community is one of the older immigrant communities in the Washington area, dating back to the 1970s. There is a clear concentration of recent arrivals from Vietnam in Bailey's Crossroads and Seven Corners (22041, 22042, 22044). The two areas, which straddle Arlington and Fairfax counties, form a nucleus for Vietnamese investment, as exemplified by the Eden Center, a shopping center which serves the large Vietnamese population.<sup>14</sup> Unlike other Asian immigrants, the recent Vietnamese immigrants commonly reside in the inner suburbs and the District of

**Figure 6**  
**Recent Latin American and Caribbean Immigrants to the Washington Metropolitan Area, 1990–1998**

**Percent of Total Latin American and Caribbean Immigrants in Region**

El Salvador	33.4
Peru	9.3
Bolivia	7.5
Jamaica	6.7
Guatemala	5.0
Mexico	4.0
Nicaragua	4.1
Trinidad & Tobago	3.6
Dominican Republic	3.5
Columbia	3.3
Other	19.6



Columbia. In fact, 22 percent of recent Vietnamese immigrants reported the D.C. 20009 zip code as their intended residence. In striking contrast to the other Asian immigrants, two out of three Vietnamese immigrants reside inside the Beltway.

Like most other Asian groups, over two-thirds (67.5 percent) of recent Korean immigrants prefer to live in the outer suburbs. While there is a notable concentration of Korean immigrants in Annandale, Virginia (22003), the majority of recent immigrants from South Korea are scattered throughout the outer suburbs (mostly in Fairfax and Montgomery counties) rather than concentrated in a single locale.

### Latin American and Caribbean Immigrants

The largest source of immigrants to the United States as a whole is Latin America (including the Caribbean), but this is not the case in the Washington region, where Latin American and Caribbean immigrants are less numerous than those from Asia. Latin Americans represent 31 percent of recent arrivals to the region.<sup>15</sup> The leading Latin American source country for the Washington region is El Salvador, followed by Peru, Bolivia, Jamaica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Mexico, Trinidad and Tobago, the Dominican Republic, and Colombia. While Mexicans accounted for nearly 29 percent of all newcomers to the United States between 1990 and 1998, they represented only 1.2 percent of Washington's recent immigrants and only 4 percent of the Latin American newcomers.

Immigrants from Latin America are concentrated inside the Beltway, where 63 percent reside. Within the Beltway, there are notable concentrations of Latin Americans, particularly Salvadorans: along Columbia Pike (22204) in South Arlington, in Langley Park/Hyattsville (20783) in Prince George's County, Silver Spring/Wheaton (20906) in

Montgomery County, and in the District of Columbia's Mount Pleasant/Adams Morgan (20009) and Petworth/ Brightwood Park (20011) neighborhoods. Of those residing inside the Beltway, one out of four reported an address within the District of Columbia.

A little over a third (37 percent) of recent immigrants from Latin America live outside the Beltway, especially in Gaithersburg (20878, 20879), Herndon (20170) and Woodbridge (22191). Latino immigrants from particular nations are more likely to live in the outer suburbs than others. For example, 51 percent of the Peruvians in the data set live outside the Beltway, whereas only 33 percent of Salvadoran immigrants reside in the outer suburbs. The preference for the outer suburbs on the part of some national origin groups may suggest that they are coming to this area with more resources or more marketable skills than Latinos from other countries.

### **African Immigrants**

In addition to Latino and Asian immigrants, the greater Washington area attracts a significant number of African immigrants, which is another distinguishing feature of the area's immigrant profile. African immigrants account for 16.2 percent of the recent arrivals in the Washington region, whereas they comprise only 3.6 percent of all new arrivals to the United States. Indeed, the Washington area attracts the largest proportional flow of Africans of any major metropolitan area in the United States.

The dominant African source country for the Washington metropolitan area is Ethiopia<sup>16</sup>, accounting for one-quarter of all African newcomers. Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Somalia follow, making up the top five African source countries in the 1990s. Like immigrants from Latin America, African immigrants prefer the neighborhoods inside the Beltway—70 percent reside there.

Although African immigrants are found in the majority of the area's zip codes, there are concentrations in some suburban areas where African-Americans are the majority—especially in Prince George's County, Montgomery County and the District of Columbia. Figure 7 shows this pattern of African residential concentration, in Prince George's County and Montgomery County, in sections of South Arlington/East Fairfax along Columbia Pike, and in the Petworth/Brightwood Park area of the District of Columbia.

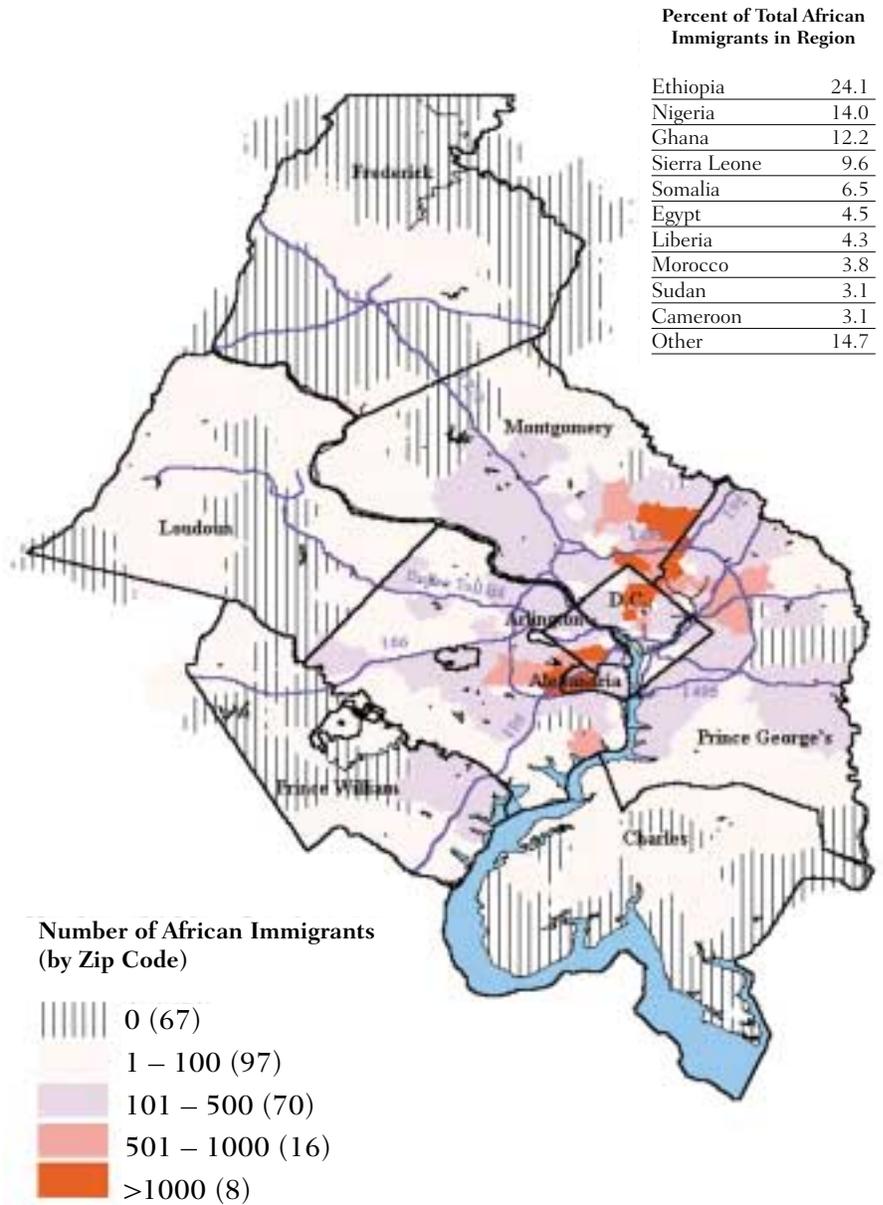
Race seems to be a factor in the residential patterning of recent African newcomers. What we don't know from these data is how much of this pattern is a result of self-selection, or how strongly a role racial prejudice and discrimination in the housing market plays in immigrants' residential selection. Africans accounted for 21 percent of new immigrants to the District of Columbia and 26 percent of new immigrants to Prince George's County. These figures are proportionately higher than their overall representation, 16.2 percent, within the immigrant population.

However, Africans are also well represented in some of the most popular residential zip codes for all immigrants. Ethiopians are ranked third among new immigrants in South Arlington's 22204 zip code and in the District's Petworth/Brightwood Park (20011) neighborhood. They are the single largest immigrant group in the ethnically diverse Landmark area (22304) of Alexandria, Virginia. Thus, while race is a factor in immigrants' residential selection, it appears that African immigrants are also drawn to areas where diverse immigrant populations have settled.

*“While Mexicans accounted for nearly 29 percent of all newcomers to the United States between 1990 and 1998, they represented only 1.2 percent of Washington's recent immigrants...”*

*“The Washington area attracts the largest proportional flow of Africans of any major metropolitan area in the United States.”*

**Figure 7**  
**Recent African Immigrants to the Washington Metropolitan Area, 1990–1998**



## Conclusion

There is remarkable dispersion in the settlement of Washington's newcomers, which the maps and figures presented in this paper make clear. While our study offers some interesting new evidence on immigrant settlement in the Washington area, it raises many more questions that need to be addressed. One question is what role does community play in immigrants' lives, given their spatial dispersion. The little research that has been done on this issue for the Washington metropolitan area<sup>17</sup> suggests that a sense of community may be maintained through social and religious networks (churches, social clubs, and sports leagues).

A second question—one that is of clear importance at the local level—is how well immigrants and their families are incorporating into the local labor and housing markets, schools, and community and social life. Public schools are an obvious stress point, where students with limited English proficiency (LEP) in some areas can be high, and students may speak an enormous number of languages. For example, in the Montgomery County school district, LEP students spoke 120 languages in 1998.<sup>18</sup> In a novel move, the school district has contracted with a telephone service to provide translation for parents and teachers in 140 languages.

A corollary set of questions is centered on how areas that have not experienced large waves of immigrants respond when the volume and pace of immigration increases dramatically. How do established organizations, institutions and programs, particularly

schools, health clinics, transportation services, and food and other commercial outlets alter their services to meet the challenges of immigrant newcomers? As many formerly native white and black neighborhoods become communities of mixed national origins, how do the longer-term residents deal with newcomers who may have very different lifestyles, needs and languages?

The Washington metropolitan area, as a new immigrant destination, offers a different model for immigrant settlement and integration. Washington receives a mix of highly educated and lower skilled immigrant labor. Regardless of economic status, newcomers to Washington do not rely upon established immigrant neighborhoods because there have been historically few. Instead residential choices appear to be made based on family ties, social networks, the housing market, access to public transportation, school choices, and other local services. Given the newness of the immigrant flow, over time distinct ethnic enclaves may emerge, like the Vietnamese settlement in Bailey's Crossroads/Seven Corners area. Yet what is currently striking about the metropolitan area is the pattern of immigrant residential dispersion throughout the inner and outer suburbs.

## Acknowledgements:

The authors gratefully acknowledge support from the Center for Washington Area Studies of The George Washington University through a Banneker Faculty Research Grant, and the International Migration Policy Program of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

The Brookings Institution would like to thank The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, Philip L. Graham Fund, Eugene & Agnes E. Meyer Foundation, Prince Charitable Trusts, Trellis Fund, and the Fannie Mae Foundation for their support of our work on the Washington metropolitan area.

Additional individual country of origin maps are available at [www.brookings.edu/urban](http://www.brookings.edu/urban)



## References

Alba, Richard D. and John R. Logan. 1991. "Variation on Two Themes: Racial and Ethnic Patterns in Attainment of Suburban Residence." *Demography* 28:431-53

Bredemeir, Kenneth. 2000. "Fairfax Grows More Affluent" *Washington Post*, June 10, 2000. A01.

Cary, Francine Curro. 1996. *Urban Odyssey: A Multicultural History of Washington, D.C.* Washington DC: Smithsonian.

Greater Washington Research Center. 1999. "International Diversity in the Washington Area." Washington, DC.

Manning, Robert. 1996. "Washington, D.C.: The Changing Social Landscape of the International Capital City." Chapter 28, in *Origins and Destinies: Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in America*, Silvia Pedraza and Ruben G. Rumbaut (eds.). Washington, DC: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Massey, Douglas S. 1985. "Ethnic Residential Segregation: A Theoretical Synthesis and Empirical Review." *Sociology and Social Research* 69:315-350.

Newbold, K.B. 1999. "Spatial distribution and redistribution of immigrants in the metropolitan United States, 1980 and 1990." *Economic Geography* 75:254-271.

Newman, Kristin E. and Marta Tienda. 1994. "The Settlement and Secondary Migration Patterns of Legalized Immigrants: Insight from Administrative Records." In *Immigration and Ethnicity*. Ed Barry Edmonston and Jeffrey S. Passel. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.

Price, Marie. 2000. "Placing the Transnational Migrant: The Socio-spatial Networks of Bolivians in Washington" Paper presented at the Latin American Studies Association, Miami, FL, March 18, 2000.

Rosenbaum, Emily, Samantha Friedman, Michael H. Schill, and Hielke Buddelmeyer. 1999. "Nativity Differences in Neighborhood Quality among New York City Households, 1996." *Housing Policy Debate* 10(3):625-658.

Audrey Singer and Amelia Brown. Forthcoming, 2001. "Immigration to the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area," in James Ciment (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of American Immigration*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1973. 1970 Census of Population: Volume 1 Characteristics of the Population, Part 10, District of Columbia. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1998. *State and Metropolitan Area Data Book 1997-98*. (5th edition) Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. 2000. Unpublished data derived from March CPS, 1997-1999. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, Ethnic and Hispanic Statistics Branch, Population Division

U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1999. *Annual Report: Legal Immigration, Fiscal Year 1998*. Washington, DC.

Wood, Joseph. 1997. "Vietnamese American Place Making in Northern Virginia" *Geographical Review* 87(1): 58-72.

Zelinsky, Wilbur and Barrett A. Lee. 1998. "Heterolocalism: an Alternative Model of the Sociospatial Behavior of Immigrant Ethnic Communities" *International Journal of Population Geography* 4: 1-18.

## Endnotes

- 1 Washington is 6th ranked behind Los Angeles (4.8 million), New York (4.6 million), Miami (1.4 million), San Francisco (1.4 million), and Chicago (1.1 million).
- 2 U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1973, 2000.
- 3 See Cary, 1996; Manning, 1996; Singer and Brown, 2000.
- 4 Alba and Logan, 1991; Rosenbaum, Friedman, Schill and Buddelmeyer, 1999.
- 5 Massey, 1985.
- 6 Zelinsky and Lee, 1998.
- 7 This is similar to the Washington Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) definition used in the 1990 Census, but excludes Calvert, MD and Stafford, VA counties.
- 8 Newman and Tienda, 1994.
- 9 The maps in this study are based on immigrants' "intended" residence at the time of application for permanent residence. This intended residence is an imperfect measure. In some cases, this could be the address of a family member, and may be a temporary address for the immigrant. Upon obtaining their legal residence, immigrants could leave the area; likewise immigrants may move into the metropolitan area after residing elsewhere in the United States. An analysis by Newbold (2000) examines the issue of immigrant settlement in the period immediately after arrival through a comparison of 1990 Census data and INS data from 1985–90. Although there appears to be mobility of immigrants shortly after arrival, it does not necessarily result in apparent changes to the concentration of the immigrant population.
- 10 Bolivia represents the second largest country of origin group in 22204, but in Figure 3 it is combined in the "next 17 countries" category because it is not one of the top ten immigrant sending countries, overall, to the Washington area.
- 11 Taiwan represents the third largest country of origin group in 20878, but in Figure 3 it is combined in the "next 17 countries" category because it is not one of the top ten immigrant sending countries, overall, to the Washington area.
- 12 Bredemeier, 2000.
- 13 Of the 130,600 recent immigrants residing inside the Beltway, 30,701 are in the District of Columbia and 99,998 are outside the District.
- 14 Wood, 1997.
- 15 We recognize that it is likely that a number of Latinos in the Washington area are undocumented and thus would not show up in the INS data set. Although we have information on some 75,000 recent Latino immigrants, if the undocumented could be added to our data set the number would be larger. In addition, all of the regional origin groups presented in this analysis would increase if we could include their (unknown) undocumented component.
- 16 Immigrants from Eritrea are included with Ethiopia.
- 17 Price, 2000.
- 18 Greater Washington Research Center, 1999.



**For More Information:**

Audrey Singer  
Associate  
International Migration  
Policy Program  
Carnegie Endowment for  
International Peace  
(202) 939-2317  
asinger@ceip.org

Samantha Friedman  
Assistant Professor of Sociology  
The George Washington University  
(202) 994-0266  
sam@gwu.edu

Ivan Cheung  
Assistant Professor of Geography  
The George Washington University  
(202) 994-5328  
icheung@gwu.edu

Marie Price  
Associate Professor of Geography  
and International Affairs  
and Director of the Latin American  
Studies Program  
The George Washington University  
(202) 994-6187  
mprice@gwu.edu

**For General Information:**

Brookings Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy  
Phone: (202) 797-6139  
Website: [www.brookings.edu/urban](http://www.brookings.edu/urban)



**THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION**

1775 Massachusetts Avenue, NW • Washington, DC 20036-2188  
Tel: 202-797-6000 • Fax: 202-797-6004  
[www.brook.edu](http://www.brook.edu)



Tel: 202-797-6139 • Fax: 202-797-2965  
[www.brookings.edu/urban](http://www.brookings.edu/urban)