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Racial Inequities in Montgomery County

2011–15

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December 2017

Montgomery County, Maryland, faces a challenge in overcoming the racial and ethnic inequities that are highlighted in the geographic divide between Council District 1, home to Bethesda and Chevy Chase, and District 5, where Silver Spring and Tacoma Park are located. Though the residents of the District 1 exceed county averages regardless of racial or ethnic group, residents of District 5, especially residents of color, often are below county averages and were less likely to have graduated high school, have enrolled in college, have a well-paying job, or own a home.

This brief measures inequities by race and ethnicity in Montgomery County and its council districts and provides a profile on what racial equity would look like in the county. Quantifying this information will help Montgomery County agencies, policymakers, and advocates recognize the community's needs and to build new solutions and create a more equitable county.

This brief was originally developed as an internal memorandum for the Consumer Health Foundation and the Meyer Foundation to inform their strategic thinking and investments and share with grantees. It describes the major highlights on demographics, education, income, employment, housing and mobility from the tables posted here: https://www.urban.org/research/publicatio/racial-inequities-montgomery-county-2011-15.

Methodology

We present the methodology first to make it easier to understand what follows. There are important caveats to be aware of when interpreting the data. This brief includes data presented for Montgomery County and the five county council districts (figure 1):

- District 1 (including Bethesda, Poolesville, and Potomac)

- District 2 (including Clarksburg, Damascus, and Germantown)

- District 3 (including Gaithersburg and Rockville)

- District 4 (including Laytonville, Olney, and Wheaton)

- District 5 (including Burtonsville, Silver Spring, and Takoma Park)[1]

Council Districts in Montgomery County, Maryland
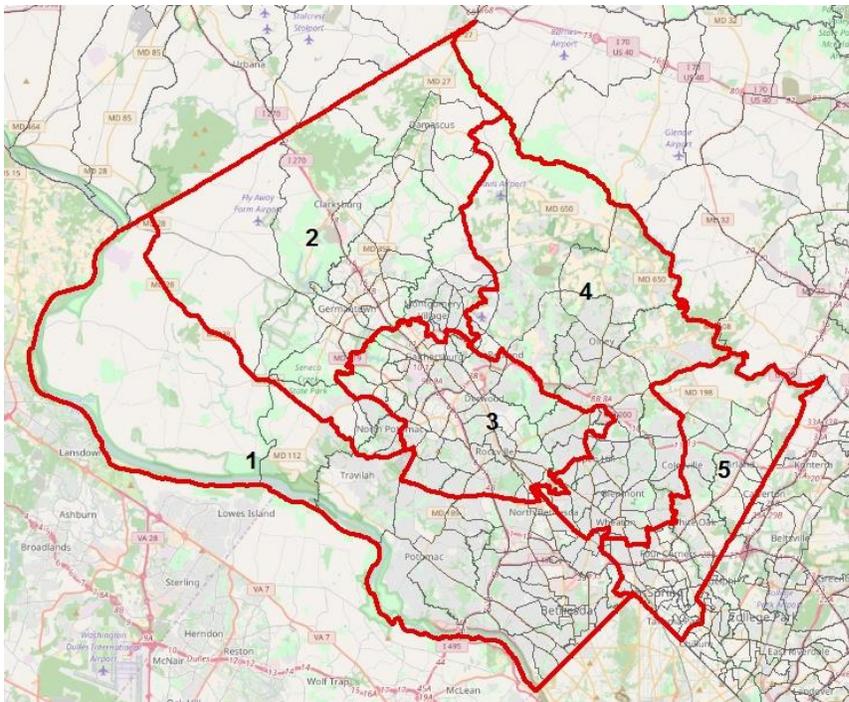
Sources: OpenStreetMap and contributors CC-BY-SA and Montgomery County geographic information systems.
Note: The light gray boundaries represent census tracts and the red are council districts.

Categorizing the Montgomery County Population by Race and Ethnicity

Racial and ethnic groups used in this brief are not mutually exclusive because of the tabulations available in the American Community Survey. Further breakouts by nationality are also not available, and the categories we use may mask some of these differences. We use the following categorization:

- White (non-Hispanic)

- Black (and no other race, regardless of ethnicity)[2]

- Hispanic (of any race, including those who identify as Latino)

- Asian or Pacific Islander (those who identified either as Asian or Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander and no other race, regardless of ethnicity)[3]

- American Indian, Alaskan Native, other or multiple races (all regardless of ethnicity)[4]

Because the groups are not mutually exclusive, percentages may not total to 100. In the above categories, Hispanics can also appear in the black, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian, Alaskan Native, other, or multiple race groups. Though there are inequities that American Indian, Alaskan Native, and other or those who identify as multiracial race, the American Community Survey does not have sufficient sample sizes to break out the data for these groups.

Though the information is more limited because of the tabulations the American Community Survey provides, we have included information on Montgomery County's foreign-born population. This includes all people born outside of the US who would not be considered "native" (people born in Puerto Rico or other US island areas or born abroad to American parents are native).

Calculation of Equity Gaps

One method to explore what an equitable Montgomery County would look like is to close the *equity gaps* between whites and other racial and ethnic groups. These gaps are calculated based on the countywide white rate for the indicator. At the district level, the comparison is still with the countywide white rate. For example, to calculate the gap in the poverty rate for blacks in District 1 (11 percent), we compare it with the countywide white poverty rate (4 percent) and determine the additional number of blacks in District 1 that would leave poverty if the black rate were equal to 4 percent. The gaps are rounded to the nearest 100 people or to the nearest 10 people if less than 100. Equity gaps for each race *should not be added together* as there may be some overlap between the Hispanic population and the black or the Asian or Pacific Islander populations.

Margins of Error

The numbers and percentages in this brief and the accompanying tables are estimates based on the five-year 2011–15 American Community Survey. Because they are survey estimates and have margins of

error associated with them, readers should use caution when comparing numbers. The margins of error have been provided for each indicator in the accompanying tables.

We emphasize only estimates where the margins of error were small and the estimates are reliable. But when one looks at small subpopulations, the margins of error are likely to be relatively large and the estimates less reliable. We suppressed the data where we did not consider the estimates reliable.[5] We also did not calculate the equity gaps if an estimate for a group in a district was not statistically significantly different than the countywide white estimate.
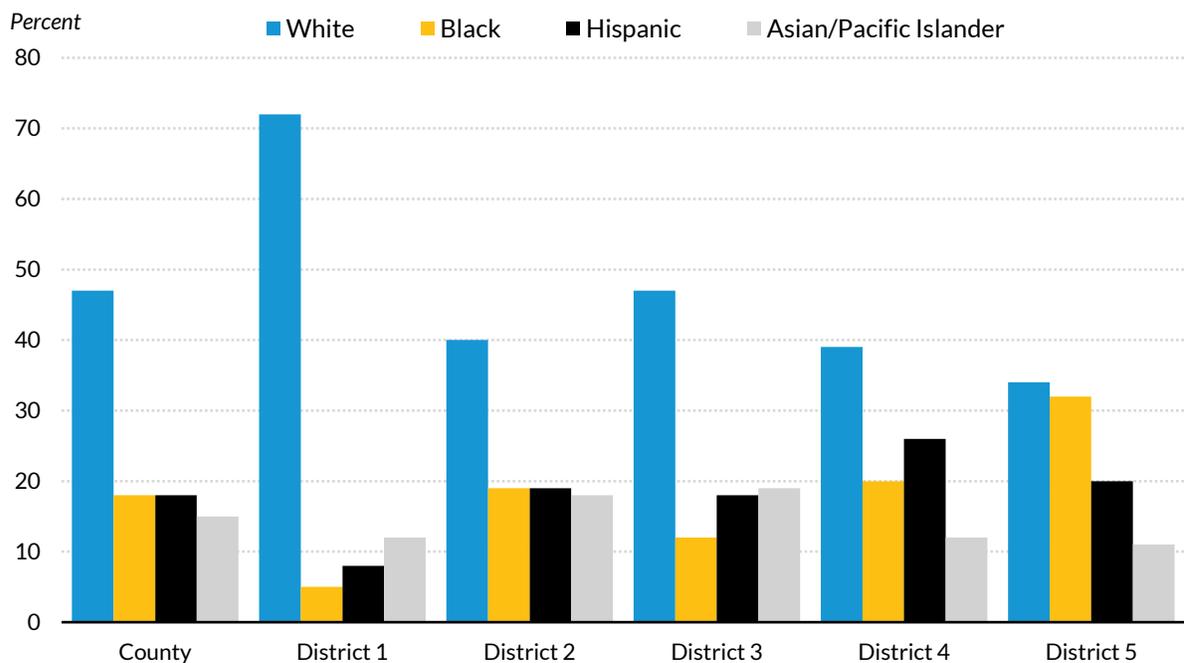
Demographics

Race and Ethnicity

In Montgomery County, the majority of residents (53 percent) were people of color. However, the largest group was white (47 percent), followed by blacks and Hispanics (18 percent each), and Asian or Pacific Islander (15 percent) (figure 2). Residents who identified as some other race, Native American or multiple races and non-Hispanic made up less than 4 percent of the population and are not shown in figure 2.

Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Population by Council Districts in Montgomery County
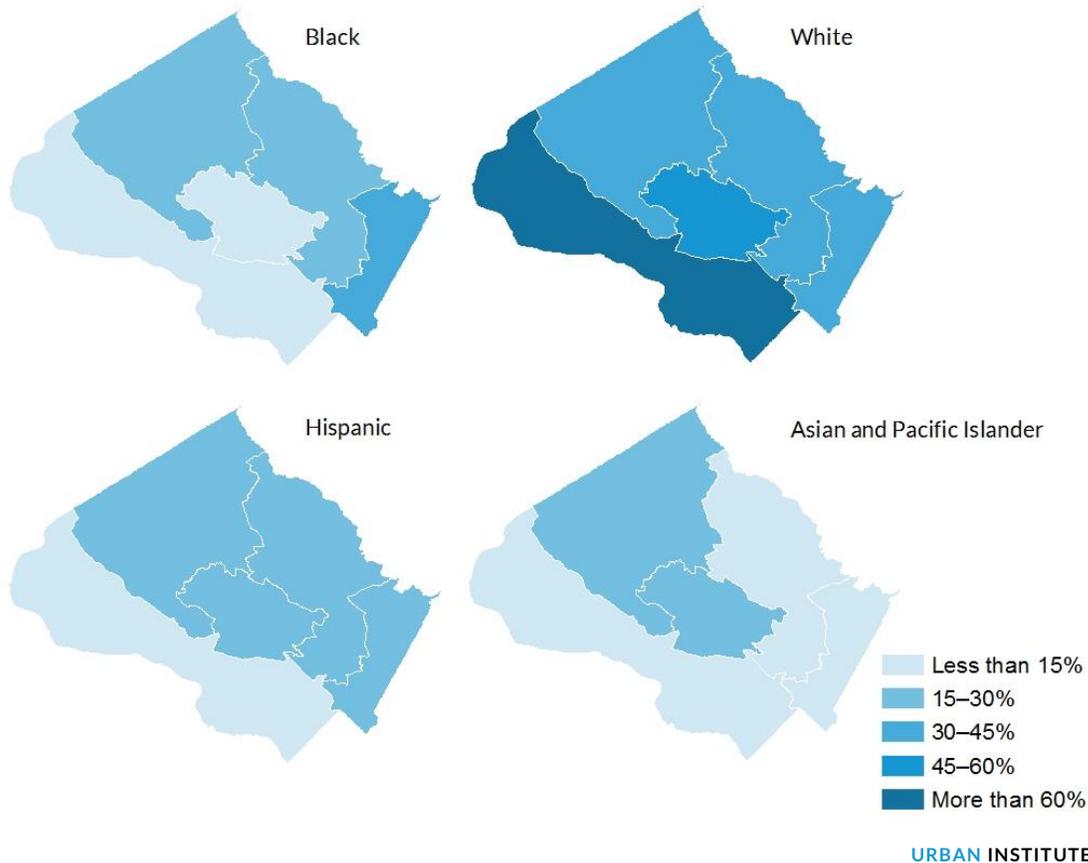*2011–15*

Source: American Community Survey, 2011–15.

The demographic distribution in the five county council districts varied widely (figures 2 and 3). In Districts 2 and 3, the breakdown of race and ethnicity mirrored that of the county: whites were the largest group, and blacks, Hispanics, and Asians or Pacific Islanders each represented roughly 20 percent of the population. District 2 had the highest proportion of whites (72 percent) and the lowest of blacks (5 percent) and Hispanics (8 percent). Districts 4 and 5 had the highest proportion of blacks (20 and 32 percent), Hispanics (26 and 20 percent), and the lowest of whites (39 and 34 percent).

As the map in figure 4 shows, many neighborhoods in Montgomery County were not very diverse in racial composition and people of color were more concentrated in certain areas. Of the 228 census tracts in the county, there were 41 in which whites made up more than 75 percent of the total tract population.

FIGURE 3

Spatial Distribution of Racial and Ethnic Groups by Council District in Montgomery County
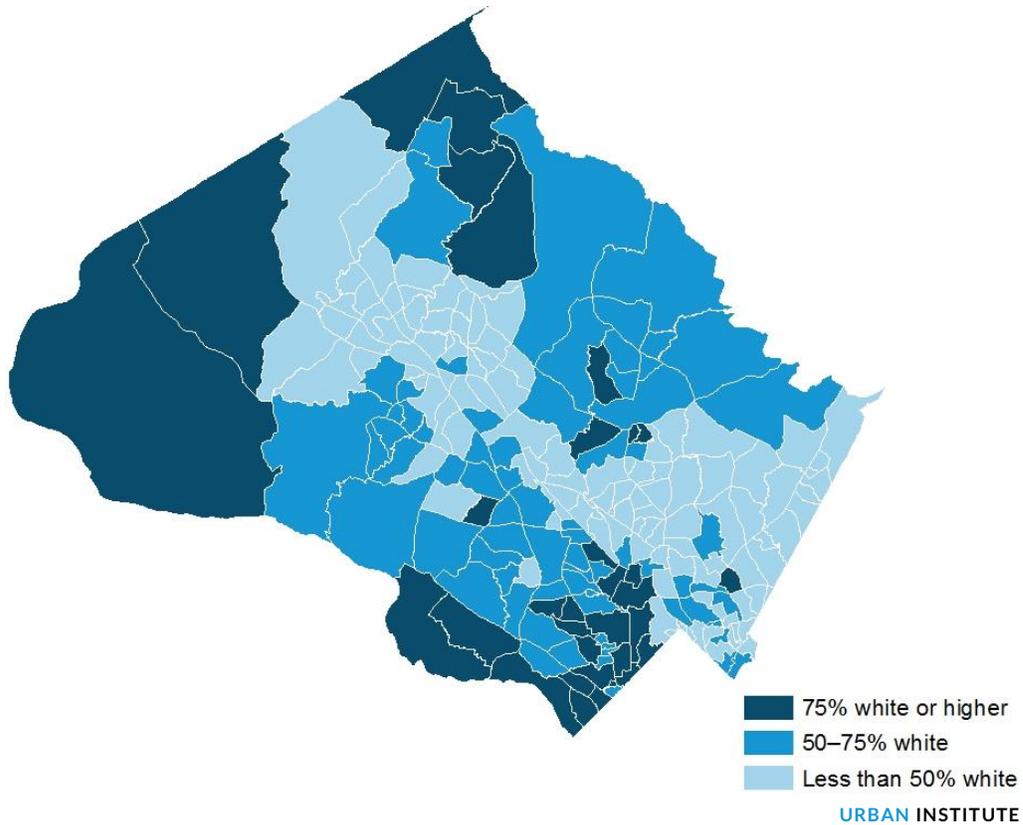*2011–15*

Source: American Community Survey, 2011–15.
Note: In this figure, all groups are mutually exclusive.

FIGURE 4

Racial Composition by Census Tract in Montgomery County

2011–15

Source: American Community Survey, 2011–15.

Age Distribution

At the county level, most of the population (42 percent) was between ages 35 and 64, 21 percent was between ages 18 and 34, 24 percent was younger than 18, and 13 percent was age 65 and older. The age distribution in the county varies by racial and ethnic groups. The Hispanic and black populations tended to be younger, with children representing larger shares of the population for those groups than for whites and Asians or Pacific Islanders. Half of the black population and 58 percent of the Hispanic population was younger than age 35. By comparison, more than half of Asians or Pacific Islanders and two-thirds of whites were age 35 and older. Almost 20 percent of whites were age 65 and older, compared with just 5 percent of Hispanics and 9 percent of blacks.

Foreign-Born Population

Across all districts, the immigrant population made up roughly one-third of the population, except in District 1 where the immigrant share of the population was lower and made up roughly one-fourth

(figure 5). Across racial and ethnic groups, Asians or Pacific Islanders were more likely to be foreign born (71 percent), followed by Hispanics (56 percent), blacks (35 percent), and whites (11 percent).

Share of the Population That Is Foreign Born by District
2011–15
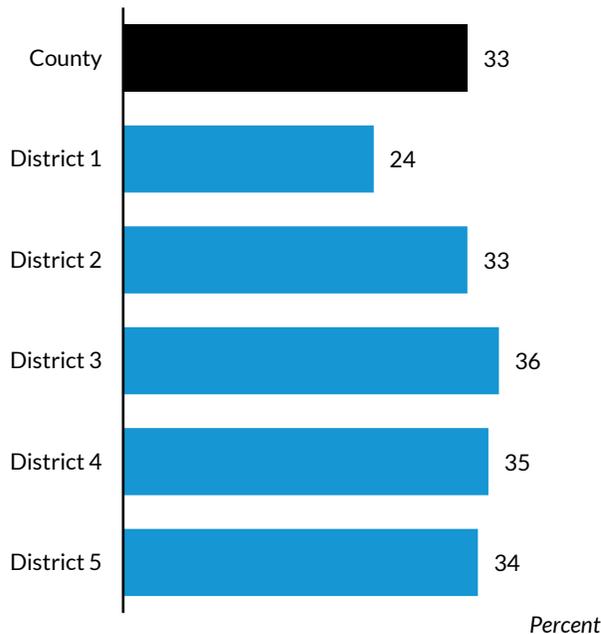
Percent

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Source: American Community Survey, 2011–15.

Educational Attainment

There were substantial differences in educational attainment for Hispanic and immigrants in Montgomery County. Nearly all white adults (98 percent) age 25 and older held a high school degree or GED, as did 97 percent of native-born adults, 92 percent of black adults, and 92 percent of Asian or Pacific Islander adults. For Hispanic adults, 69 percent had a high school diploma, and 83 percent of immigrants did. However, the patterns of educational attainment also differed by council district. In District 1, 98 percent of the total population had a high school degree, compared with 87–92 percent in the other districts.

Looking at race, ethnicity, and nativity within districts, there is stark contrast. Hispanics and immigrants in District 1 had much higher educational attainment, where 92 and 95 percent, respectively, had high school degrees than in District 5, where only 60 percent of Hispanics and 77 percent of immigrants had high school degrees. However, the share of blacks with a high school degree was consistent across districts (92–93 percent). In an equitable Montgomery County, 42,700 more
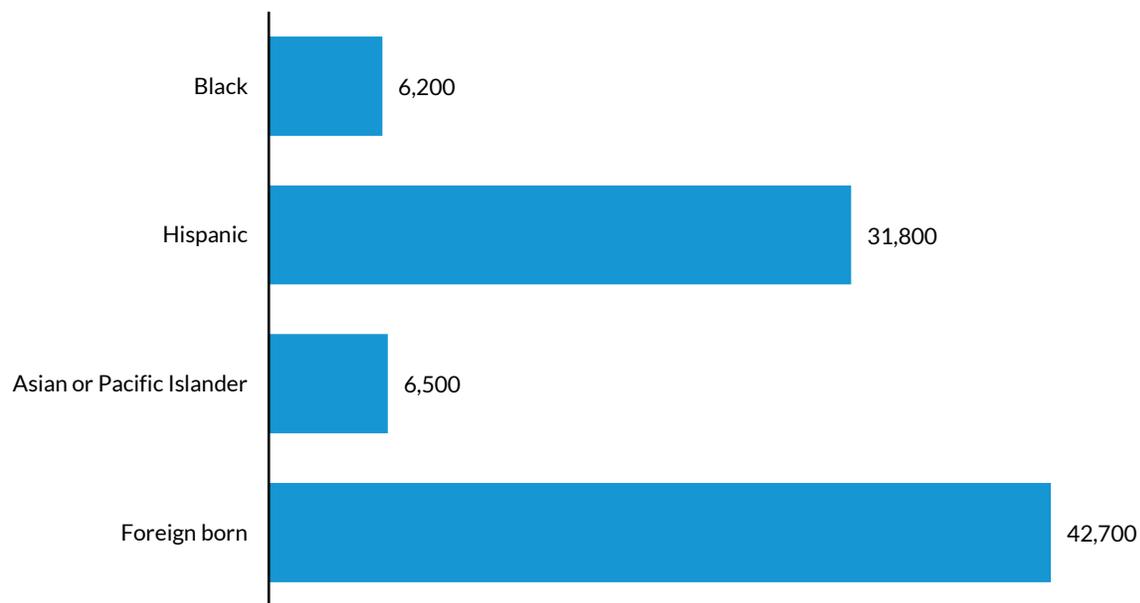
immigrants, 31,800 more Hispanics, 6,500 more Asians or Pacific Islanders, and 6,200 more black adults would have high school degrees.

Like high school educational attainment, there were substantial differences in college education for Hispanic and immigrants. White and native-born adults had the highest shares of adults with at least some college education (88 and 86 percent, respectively), followed by Asian or Pacific Islander adults (81 percent), and black adults (72 percent). Hispanic and immigrants had the lowest shares of adults with at least some college (45 percent and 65 percent, respectively).

For blacks and Hispanics in District 1, the rate of high school degree attainment was not statistically different from the rates for the white population. Similarly, in District 1, all racial and ethnic groups had a college education attainment rate that was not statistically different from the white rate. In an equitable Montgomery County, 64,800 more immigrants, 46,500 more Hispanics, 17,500 more blacks, and 7,300 more Asians or Pacific Islanders would have some college education (figure 6).

FIGURE 6

Increase in Number of People with a High School Degree with Equity
2011–15

Source: American Community Survey, 2011–15.

In an equitable Montgomery County, 42,700 more immigrants, 31,800 more Hispanics, 6,500 more Asians or Pacific Islanders, and 6,200 more black adults would have high school degrees. And 64,800 more immigrants, 46,500 more Hispanics, 17,500 more blacks, and 7,300 more Asians or Pacific Islanders would have some college education.

Income

Among households, which include both families and households where single adults or nonrelated people live together, the average income in Montgomery County was $133,500. Households headed by whites had average incomes nearly 1.8 times larger than those headed by blacks or Hispanics. Asian- or Pacific Islander–headed households had average incomes right around the county average (figure 7).

The highest average household income was in District 1 ($205,600) where every racial and ethnic group had an income above $100,000. This average was more than double District 5, the lowest, at $102,500. Within all districts, there was variation in average household income by racial and ethnic group, with households headed by white adults having higher average incomes than households headed by black adults or Hispanic adults. For example, in District 5, households headed by whites had average incomes of $129,800, compared with $71,600 for households headed by Hispanics and $81,100 for households headed by blacks.

FIGURE 7

Average Household Income in 2015 Dollars

2011–15

White $159,900

Black $88,100

Hispanic $87,800
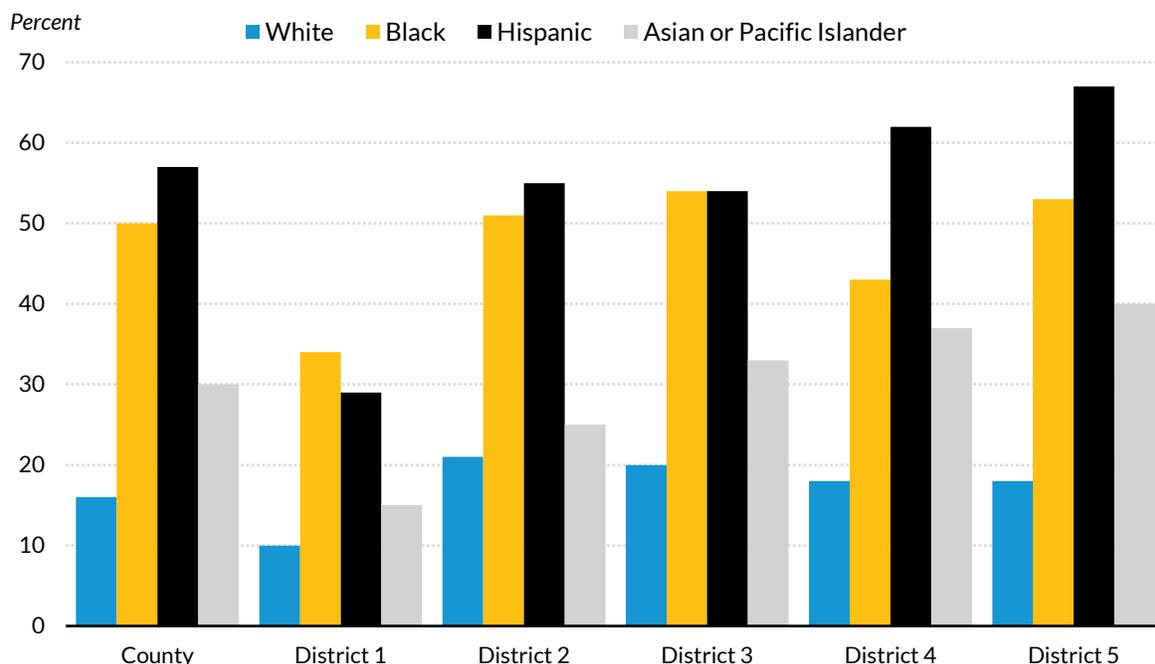
Asian or Pacific Islander $131,000
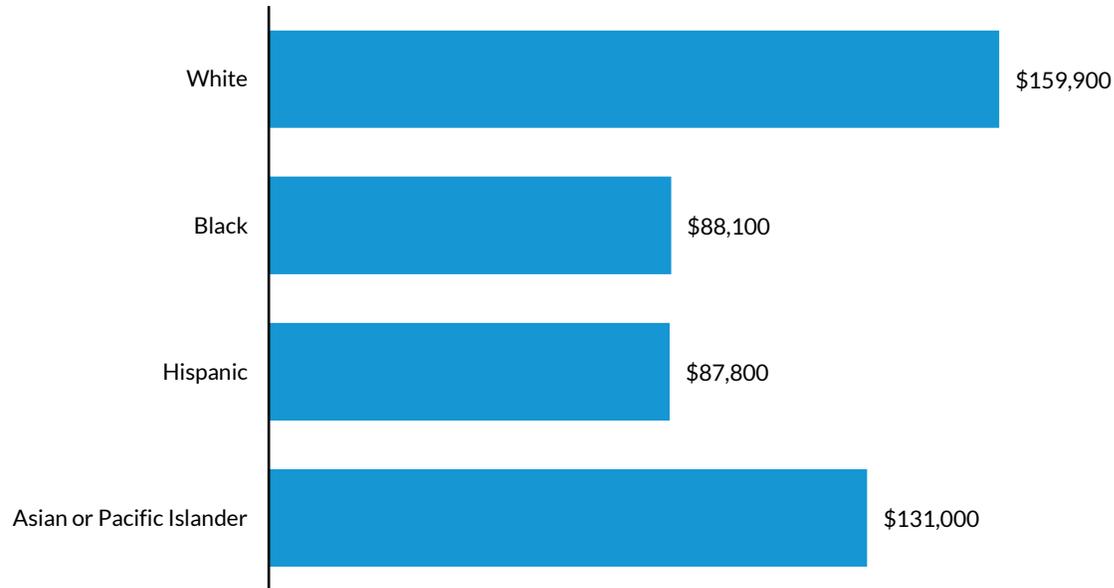
Source: American Community Survey, 2011–15.

According to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Living Wage calculator, the living wage in Montgomery County, which would enable a full-time worker to provide for a family with two children, is approximately $34.87/hour or about $72,000 in annual income.[6] Yet, 3 in 10 families in Montgomery County had incomes of less than $75,000. There were clear racial and ethnic inequities, as well as geographic disparities, in the families who had incomes below the living wage level in Montgomery County (figure 8).[7] More than half of black and Hispanic families had an annual income of less than $75,000 whereas only one-third of Asian or Pacific Islander families and 16 percent of white families had incomes below that level. In District 5, the share of families with incomes of less than $75,000 (40 percent) was more than three times the share of families in District 1 (13 percent). In an equitable Montgomery County, an additional 16,000 Hispanic families, 14,000 black families, and 5,000 more Asian or Pacific Islander families would have incomes above $75,000.

FIGURE 8

Share of Families with Annual Income below $75,000 in 2015 Dollars

2011–15

Percent

■ White   ■ Black   ■ Hispanic   ■ Asian or Pacific Islander

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Source: American Community Survey, 2011–15.

White families and Asian or Pacific Islander families were more likely to have high incomes, just over 30 percent of white families and 20 percent of Asian or Pacific Islander families had annual incomes of more than $200,000. By comparison, only 9 percent of black families and 6 percent of Hispanic families had an annual income over $200,000. More than 25 percent of black or Hispanic families in District 1 had incomes over $200,000, but that fell to less than 10 percent in all other council districts.

In Montgomery County, 7 percent of the population lived below the federal poverty level. Twelve percent of Hispanics, 11 percent of blacks, 9 percent of immigrants, 6 percent of Asian or Pacific Islanders, and 4 percent of whites were poor. In an equitable Montgomery County, 17,500 more immigrants, 14,800 more Hispanic, 13,100 more black and 3,500 more Asian or Pacific Islander residents would live above the poverty level. More than half of these residents would be located in Districts 4 and 5.

The child poverty rate for Montgomery County was 8 percent, but the child poverty rate for blacks (16 percent) was double the county rate and eight times the white rate (2 percent). The child poverty rate for Hispanics (14 percent) was seven times the white rate, and the child poverty rate for Asians or Pacific Islander (6 percent) was under the county rate, but it was still three times the white rate.

In an equitable Montgomery County, an additional 16,000 Hispanic families, 14,000 black families, and 5,000 more Asian or Pacific Islander families would have incomes above $75,000. And 17,500 more immigrants, 14,800 more Hispanic, 13,100 more black and 3,500 more Asian or Pacific Islander residents would live above the poverty level.
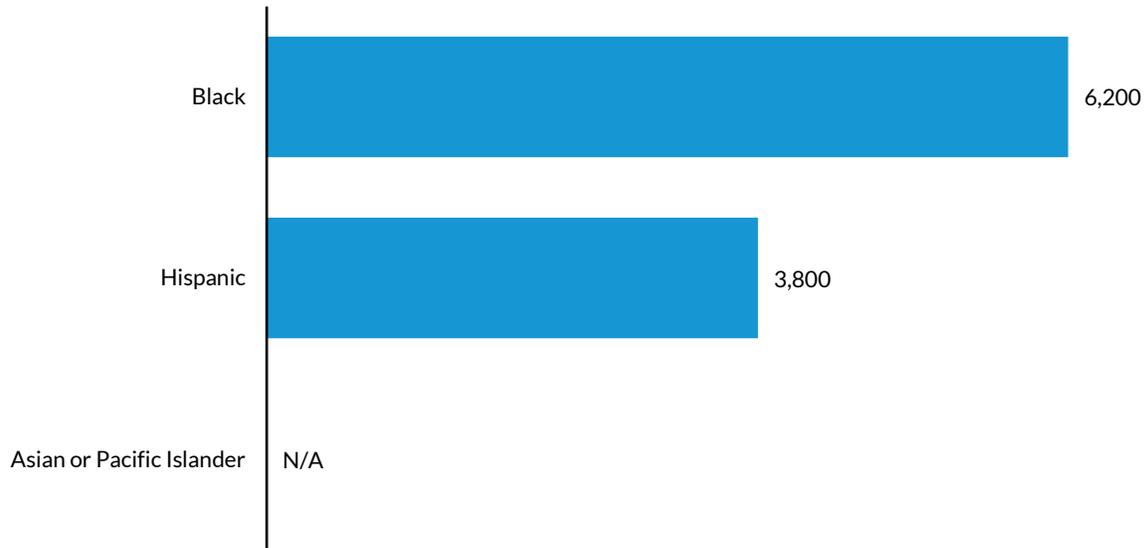
Employment

For residents of Montgomery County ages 16 to 64, whites had the highest employment rate (78 percent), closely followed by Hispanics (77 percent). Blacks in this age group had the lowest employment rate (73 percent). There was little variation in the employment rates geographically, all districts have rates of 76 or 77 percent.

When looking at the population age 16 and older in the labor force, which includes people who are employed or actively looking for work (unemployed), inequities in employment are revealed. Despite higher labor force participation rates, blacks and Hispanics had higher unemployment rates at 10 percent and 8 percent, respectively, compared with 6 percent countywide, 4 percent for whites, and 5 percent for Asian or Pacific Islanders. In an equitable Montgomery County, 6,200 more black residents and 3,800 more Hispanic residents would be employed, with more than half of these residents living in Districts 4 and 5 (figure 9).

FIGURE 9

Increase in the Number of Employed People with Equity in Montgomery County
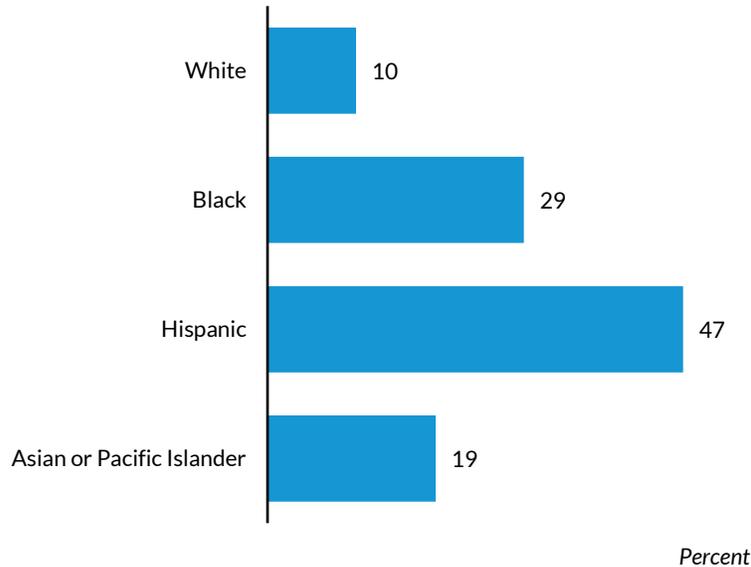
2011–15

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Source: American Community Survey, 2011–15.
Note: There was no statistical difference between the Asian or Pacific Islander and white unemployment rate.

Of those age 16 and older, 49 percent were working full time in Montgomery County, which was roughly the case across council districts and racial or ethnic groups. Of those working full time, black and Hispanic workers were more likely to earn less than $35,000. A little less than half of Hispanic residents and one-third of black residents age 16 and older in Montgomery County working full time earned less than $35,000, compared with only 10 percent of whites (figure 10). More than one-quarter of residents ages 16 and older in Districts 4 and 5 were working full time and earning less than $35,000. In an equitable Montgomery County, 24,800 fewer Hispanics, 12,900 fewer blacks, and 5,600 fewer Asian or Pacific Islanders who are working full time would have earnings below $35,000.

FIGURE 10

Share of Population Working Full Time with Earnings below $35,000

2011–15

	Percent
White	10
Black	29
Hispanic	47
Asian or Pacific Islander	19

Source: American Community Survey, 2011–15.

At the county level, more than half of those working full time earned less than $75,000 annually. More than 8 in 10 Hispanic residents, 7 in 10 black residents, and 5 in 10 Asian or Pacific Islander residents working full time did not earn this living wage, compared with 4 in 10 white residents. In an equitable Montgomery County, an additional 29,000 Hispanic residents, 19,900 black residents, and 7,500 Asian or Pacific Islander residents working full time would earn a living wage.

Some of the inequities in income may be attributable to occupational differences. More than three-quarters of whites and Asians or Pacific Islanders worked in management, business, science or art occupations compared with less than half of blacks and one-quarter of Hispanics. Blacks (20 percent) and Hispanics (32 percent) were much more likely to work in service occupations than whites (8 percent). There was more even distribution across sales and office occupations by race and ethnicity, but Hispanics were much more likely to work in natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations (18 percent) than other groups (2–3 percent).

In an equitable Montgomery County, 24,800 Hispanics, 12,900 blacks, and 5,600 Asian or Pacific Islanders who are working full time would have earnings below $35,000. And an additional 29,000 Hispanic residents, 19,900 black residents, and 7,500 Asian or Pacific Islander residents working full time would earn a living wage.

Homeownership and Mobility

The homeownership rate for Montgomery County was 66 percent. Whites and Asians or Pacific Islanders have the highest homeownership rates (75 and 74 percent), followed by Hispanics (50 percent), and blacks (44 percent).

District 5 has the lowest homeownership rate (53 percent) across all racial and ethnic groups, and District 2 has the highest (75 percent). The pattern in homeownership rates by race and ethnicity at the county level was also found across districts (figure 11). In an equitable Montgomery County, 19,600 more blacks, 12,000 more Hispanics, and 800 more Asians or Pacific Islanders would be homeowners, and the most gains in homeownership would occur in District 5.

FIGURE 11

Homeownership Rate by District in Montgomery County
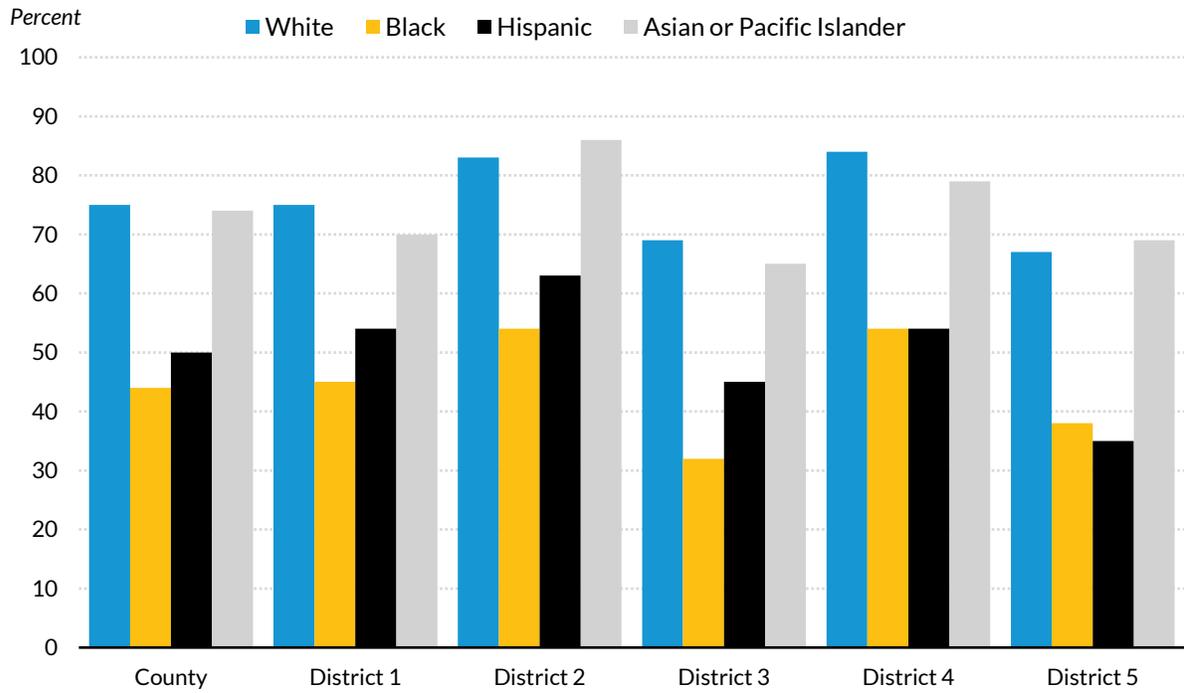
2011–15

Percent

■ White ■ Black ■ Hispanic ■ Asian or Pacific Islander

Source: American Community Survey, 2011–15.

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In an equitable Montgomery County, 19,600 more blacks, 12,000 more Hispanics, and 800 more Asians or Pacific Islanders would be homeowners, and the most gains in homeownership would occur in District 5.

About 14 percent of Montgomery County residents moved in the previous year, comparable to the national rate of 15 percent. Mobility was 18 percent for blacks and Hispanics, 13 percent for Asians or Pacific Islanders, and 10 percent for whites.

Only 6 percent of Montgomery County residents moved into the county from somewhere outside of the Montgomery County in the previous year; this mobility accounted for less than half of all moves for those who moved in the previous year in the county. District 1 and District 5 had the highest mobility rates from outside the county (8 percent each). Blacks also had slightly higher rates of moving

in from outside the county at 8 percent, compared with 5 percent for whites and 6 percent for Hispanics and Asians or Pacific Islanders.

Notes

1. "All Districts Map," Montgomery County Council, accessed December 5, 2017, http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/district_map.html.

2. Only 3 percent of blacks in Montgomery County in 2011–15 who identified as their race as black alone also identified as Hispanic.

3. Less than 1 percent of Asian or Pacific Islanders also identified themselves as Hispanic.

4. There is more overlap between this category and the Hispanic category in Montgomery County than we find for blacks and Asians or Pacific Islanders. About 95 percent of those identified as some other race, 43 percent of those who identify as American Indians, 26 percent of those who identify as two or more races also identify as Hispanic.

5. Estimates have been suppressed if the Coefficient of Variation for the estimate is greater than 30 percent (US Census Bureau 2009).

6. Represents the living wage in 2015. See "Living Wage Calculation for Montgomery County, Maryland," Living Wage Calculator, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, accessed December 5, 2017, http://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/24031.

7. Earnings are discussed in the employment section. This section focuses on all income for a family. The American Community Survey tabulation do not break out incomes at $72,000, so we have used $75,000 as the closest proxy.

Reference

US Census Bureau. 2009. *A Compass for Understanding and Using American Community Survey Data: What Researchers Need to Know*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.

About the Authors

Leah Hendey is a senior research associate in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center at the Urban Institute, where she focuses on housing policy and on policy to improve neighborhoods. Experienced in working with national and local administrative datasets, she has been involved in Urban's work with the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership and is its deputy director. Leah has led Urban's efforts to describe the racial inequities in the District of Columbia and the Washington, DC, region.

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