



# Racial Inequities in Fairfax County

2011-15

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**Fairfax County, Virginia, is an affluent jurisdiction, with average household incomes for every racial and ethnic group near or exceeding \$100,000. But the county has underlying inequities in education, income, employment, and homeownership, particularly for Hispanic residents and immigrants. There are also clear inequities in outcomes between and within supervisor districts, with large inequities in the Lee and Mason districts, among others.**

This brief measures inequities by race and ethnicity in Fairfax County and its supervisor districts and provides a profile on what equity would look like for people of color. Quantifying this information will help Fairfax County agencies, school board, policymakers, and advocates working to implement the One Fairfax social and racial equity policy recognize the community's needs and to build new solutions and create a more equitable county.<sup>1</sup>

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 to 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/publication/racial-inequities-fairfax-county-2011-15>.

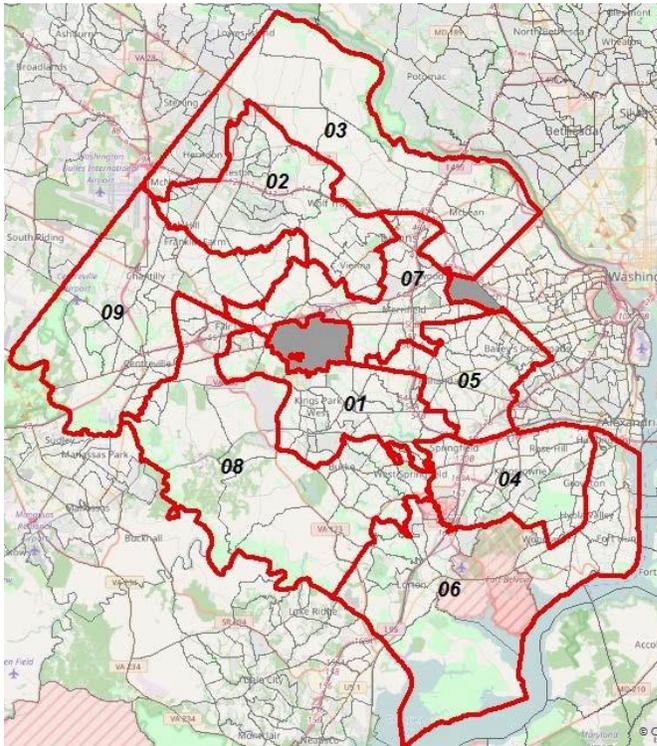
# Methodology

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 Fairfax County and the nine districts represented by the Fairfax County board of supervisors (figure 1):<sup>2</sup>

- 01: Braddock
- 02: Hunter Mill
- 03: Dranesville
- 04: Lee
- 05: Mason
- 06: Mount Vernon
- 07: Providence
- 08: Springfield
- 09: Sully

FIGURE 1

### Supervisor Districts in Fairfax County, Virginia



Sources: OpenStreetMap and contributors CC-BY-SA and Fairfax County geographic information systems and mapping.

Notes: The light gray boundaries outline census tracts, and the red boundaries outline supervisor districts. The grayed-out areas represent the cities Fairfax and Falls Church, which are independent jurisdictions and are excluded from this analysis.

### Categorizing the Fairfax County Population by Race and Ethnicity

Racial and ethnic groups used in this brief are not mutually exclusive because of 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)<sup>3</sup>
- 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)<sup>4</sup>
- American Indian, Alaska Native, other or multiple races (all regardless of ethnicity)<sup>5</sup>

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

Though the information is limited because of the tabulations the American Community Survey provided, we have included information on Fairfax County's foreign-born population. Foreign-born includes all people born outside 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 Fairfax 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 supervisor district level, the comparison is still to the countywide white rate. For example, to calculate the gap in the poverty rate for blacks in the Mason district (13 percent), we compare it with the countywide white poverty rate (3 percent) and determine the additional number of blacks in Mason who would leave poverty if the black rate were 3 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 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, 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.<sup>6</sup> The equity gaps were also not calculated if an estimate for a group in a district was not statistically significantly different than the countywide white estimate.

# Demographics

## Race and Ethnicity

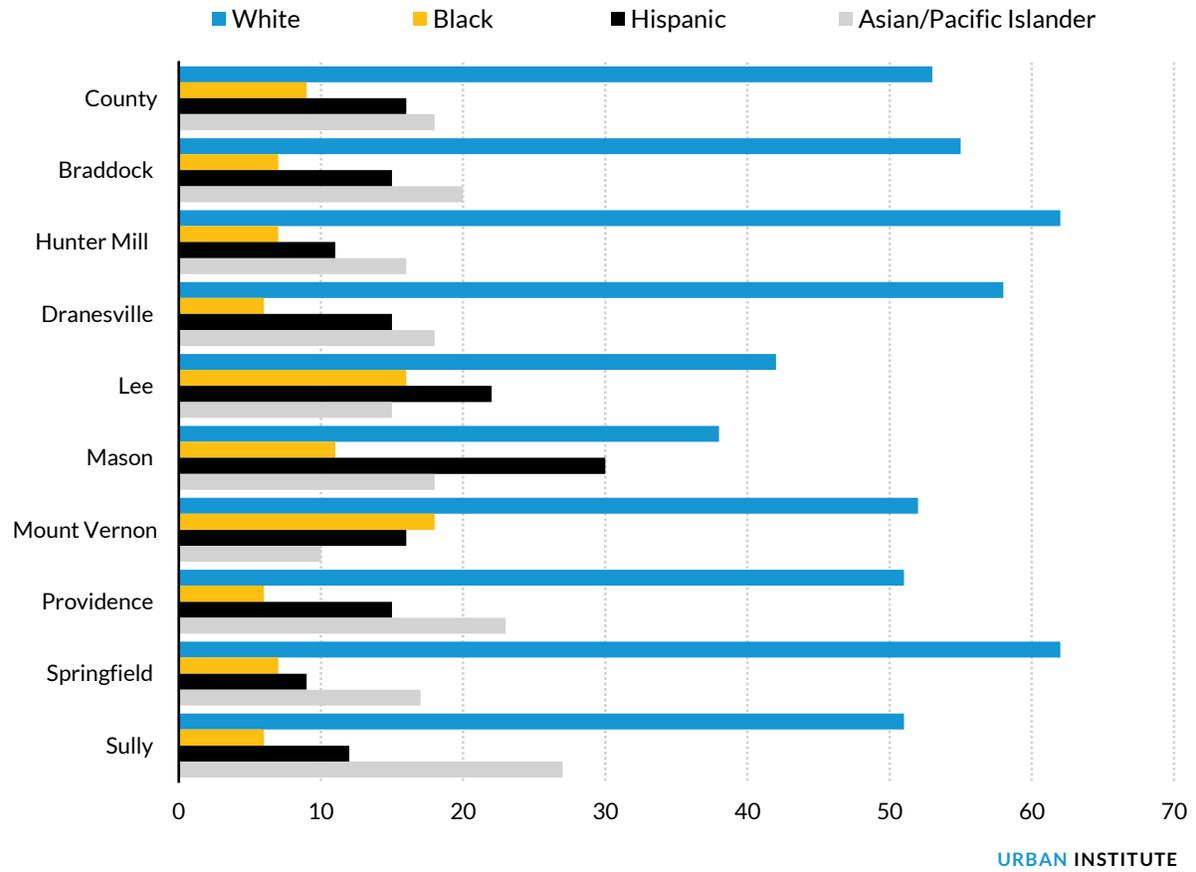
At the county level, the population was majority white (53 percent), and Asians or Pacific Islanders (18 percent) and Hispanics (16 percent) were the next-largest demographic groups. The black population stood at 9 percent, and other racial or ethnic groups made up less than 5 percent each.

Though Fairfax County's supervisor districts roughly mirrored the county's demographic breakdown, some districts contained greater concentrations of specific racial and ethnic groups (figure 2). Districts such as Dranesville, Hunter Mill, and Springfield that are on the county edge and farthest west had the largest proportion of whites (each about 60 percent). Mount Vernon and Lee, in southern Fairfax, contained the largest proportion of blacks (18 and 16 percent, respectively). Mason was the most diverse, with a population that was 30 percent Hispanic, 18 percent Asian or Pacific Islander, 11 percent black, and 38 percent white. Sully had the highest proportion of Asians or Pacific Islanders (27 percent).

Figure 3 shows the spatial distribution of racial and ethnic groups in Fairfax County by supervisor district. There were higher shares of blacks in the southern portion, and Hispanics were more concentrated in the southern and eastern districts.

FIGURE 2

Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Population by Supervisor District in Fairfax County  
2011-15

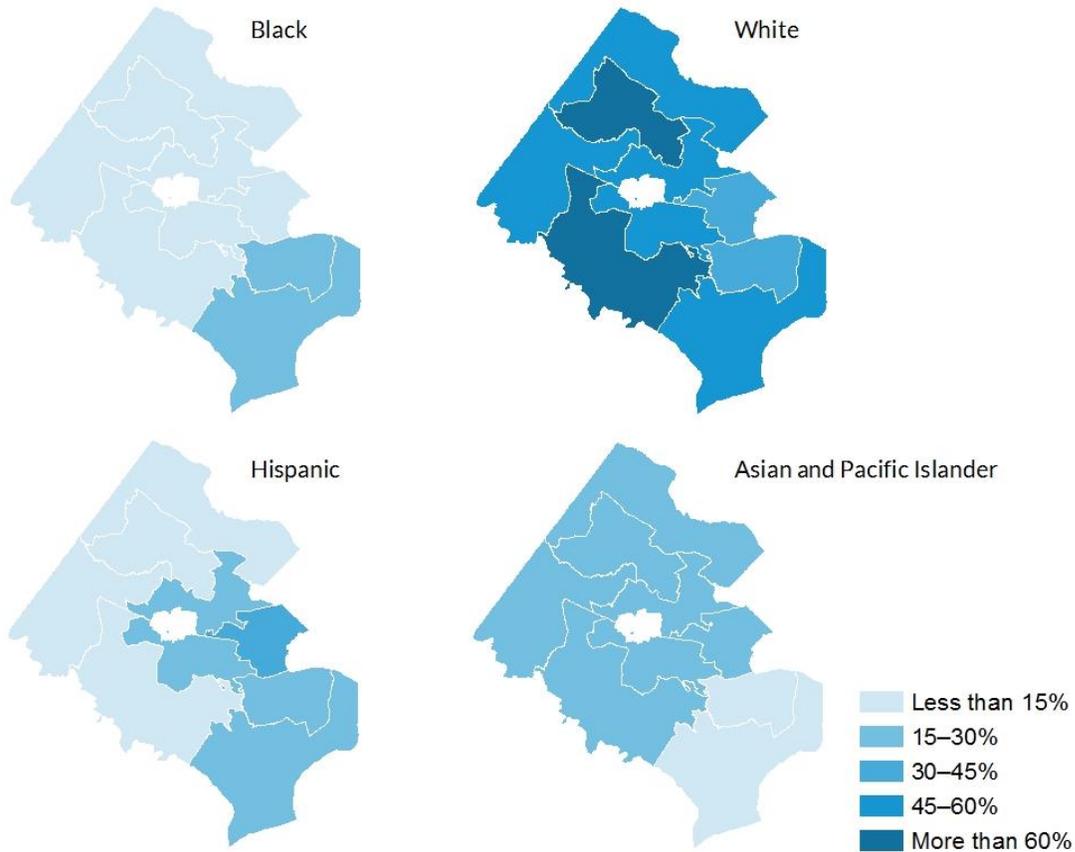


Source: American Community Survey, 2011-15.

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FIGURE 3

**Spatial Distribution of Racial and Ethnic Groups by Supervisor District in Fairfax County  
2011-15**



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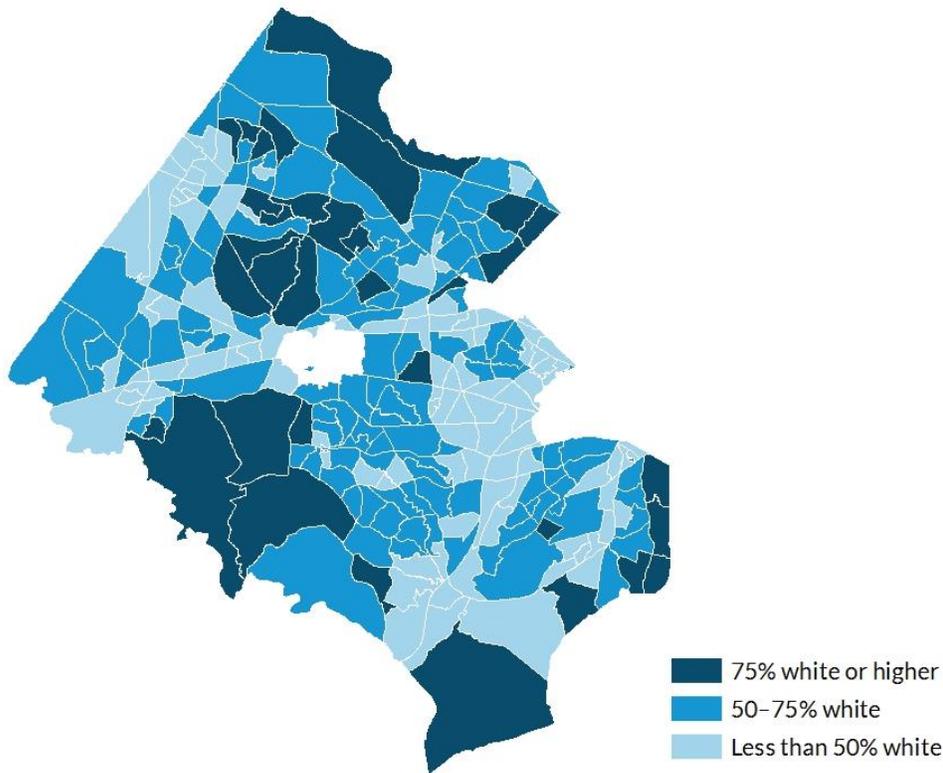
Source: American Community Survey, 2011-15.

Note: In this figure, all groups are mutually exclusive.

Figure 4 shows that many Fairfax County neighborhoods were not racially diverse. Of the 259 census tracts in Fairfax County, whites made up more than 75 percent of the tract population in 34 tracts and between 50 and 75 percent in 117 tracts. People of color were the majority of residents in only one-third of census tracts.

FIGURE 4

**Racial Composition by Census Tract in Fairfax County  
2011-15**



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Source: American Community Survey, 2011-15.

### Age Distribution

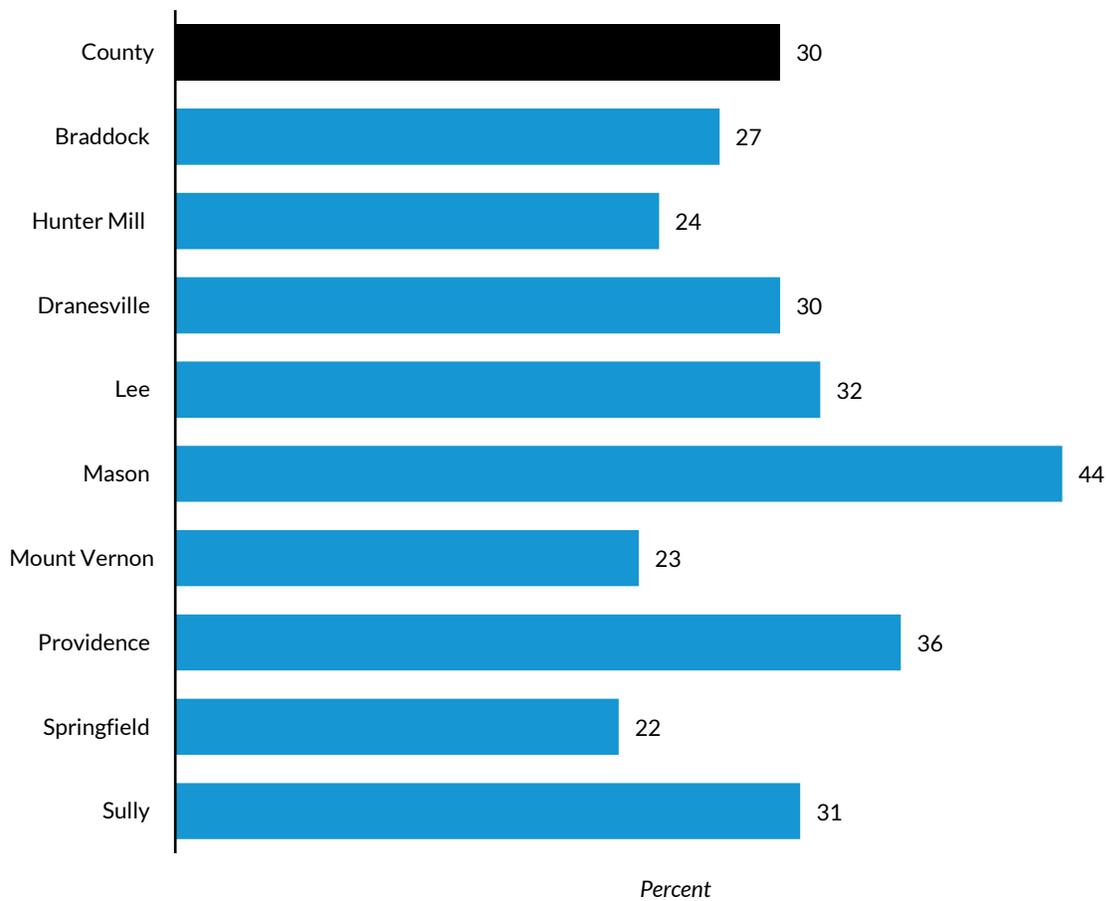
In Fairfax County, children made up 24 percent of the population, 18- to 34-year-olds 22 percent, 35- to 64-year-olds 43 percent, and people age 65 and older 11 percent. Hispanics in Fairfax County tended to be younger than other groups. Nearly three in five Hispanics were age 34 and younger. Between racial and ethnic groups and between districts, the proportion of children younger than 18 was consistent, but Hispanics had the largest proportion of children (30 percent) and whites the least (21 percent). Sully had the largest proportion of children of any district (27 percent), a reflection of having the largest proportion of children for both Hispanics (35 percent) and Asians or Pacific Islanders (26 percent). The millennial generation (ages 18 to 34) was highest for Hispanics (28 percent). All other racial and ethnic groups were 20 to 25 percent millennials. At the other end of the age spectrum, 15 percent of whites were age 65 and older compared with 4 to 9 percent for other groups.

## Foreign-Born Population

Immigrants made up 30 percent of Fairfax County's population, and the largest share (44 percent) were in Mason (figure 5). Springfield had the smallest immigrant population (22 percent). The racial and ethnic group with the largest share of immigrants was Asian or Pacific Islanders (77 percent), followed by Hispanics (54 percent), blacks (28 percent), and whites (9 percent). The largest shares across all racial and ethnic groups lived in Mason.

FIGURE 5

### Share of the Population That Is Foreign Born by District 2011-15



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Source: American Community Survey, 2011-15.

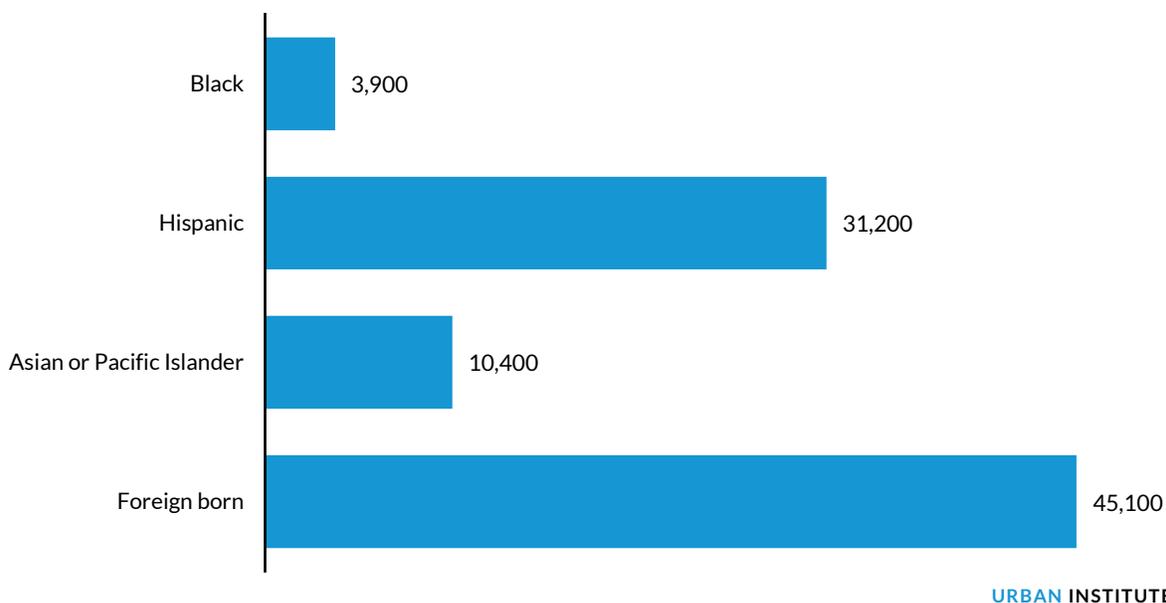
# Educational Attainment

There were substantial differences in educational attainment for Hispanics and immigrants, and there were lower rates of educational attainment across the board in Lee and in Mason. Ninety-eight percent of white adults age 25 and older held high school diplomas or GED, and 88 percent had some college education. The rates for educational attainment were the same for the native-born population. More than 90 percent of black and Asian or Pacific Islander adults age 25 and older had high school degrees, but only 71 percent of black and 78 percent of Asian or Pacific Islander adults had some college. Eighty-three percent of immigrants had their high school degrees, as did 69 percent of Hispanic adults. Sixty-five percent of immigrants and 48 percent of Hispanic adults had some college experience.

In an equitable Fairfax County, 45,000 more foreign-born adults, 31,000 more Latinos, 10,000 more Asians or Pacific Islanders, and 3,900 more blacks would have high school degrees (figure 6). Similarly, 68,000 more immigrants, 43,000 more Hispanics, 15,000 more Asians or Pacific Islanders, and 11,000 more blacks would have some postsecondary education. For blacks and Asians or Pacific Islanders in many districts, the rate of high school degree attainment was not statistically different from the rates for white adults.

FIGURE 6

Increase in the Number of People with High School Degrees with Equity  
2011-15



Source: American Community Survey, 2011-15.

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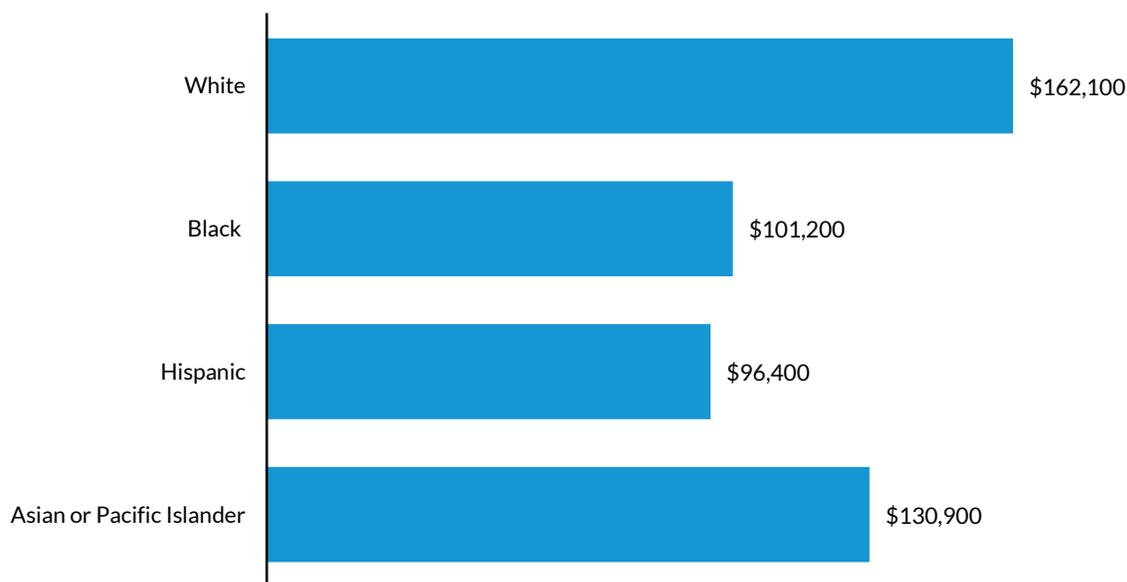
## Income

Among households, which include both families and households where single adults or nonrelated people live together, the average household income in Fairfax County was \$143,000. Households headed by whites were the only ones that were above average, at \$162,000 (figure 7). Asian- or Pacific Islander-headed households had an average household income of \$131,000, followed by households headed by blacks (\$101,000) and Hispanics (\$96,000). Across districts, average household income ranged from \$108,500 in Mason to \$210,500 in Dranesville.

FIGURE 7

### Average Household Income in 2015 Dollars

2011-15



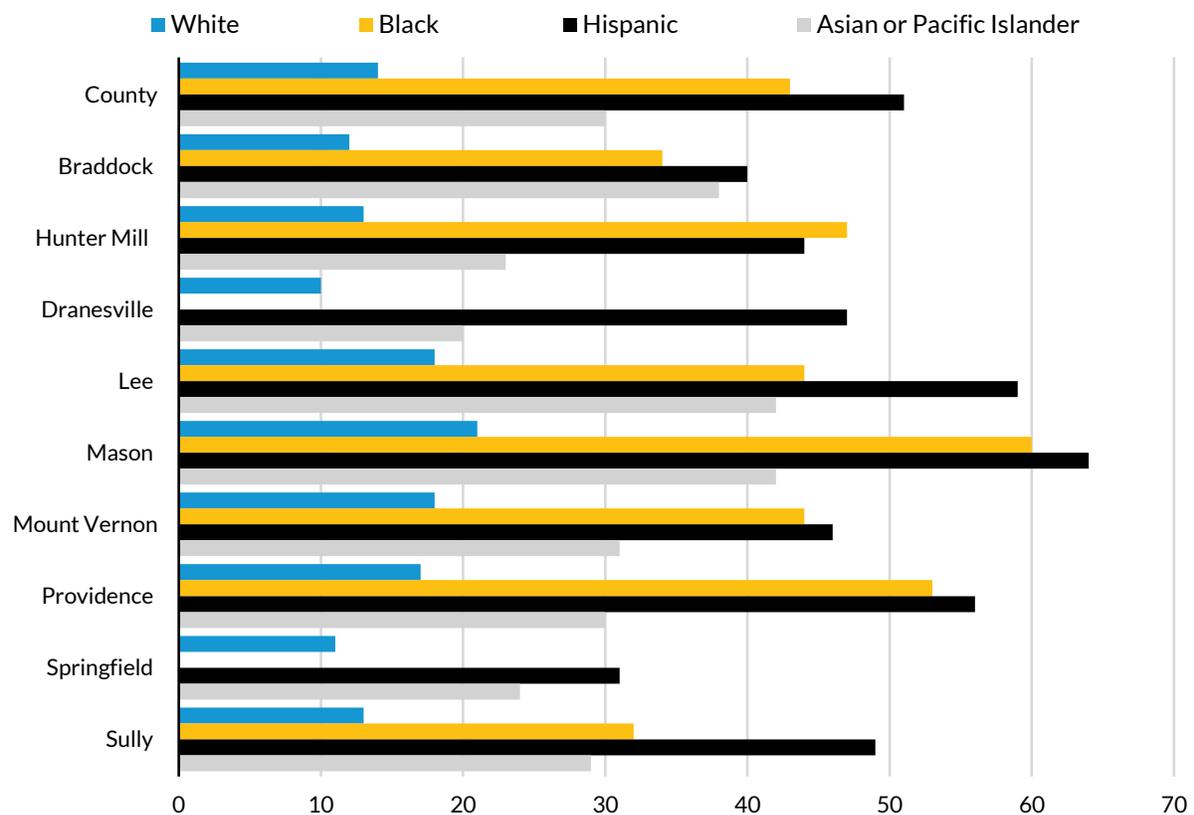
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Source: American Community Survey, 2011-15.

According to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Living Wage Calculator, the living wage in Fairfax County, which would enable a full-time worker to provide for a family with two children, was approximately \$33.30 an hour or about \$69,000 a year.<sup>7</sup> But many families in Fairfax County struggled to earn a living wage, especially in Mason, where 41 percent of families had annual incomes below \$75,000.<sup>8</sup> There were clear racial and ethnic inequities for the families who had incomes below the living wage level. Fifty-one percent of Hispanic families, 43 percent of black families, and 30 percent of Asian or Pacific Islander families had incomes below \$75,000, compared with only 14 percent of white families. Within districts, the income inequities by race and ethnicity were also stark, even in well-off districts, such as Dranesville and Hunter Mill (figure 8). In an equitable Fairfax County, an additional 13,000 Hispanic families, 8,000 Asian or Pacific Islander families, and 7,000 black families would have annual incomes above \$75,000.

FIGURE 8

**Share of Families with Annual Income below \$75,000 in 2015 Dollars**  
2011-15



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Source: American Community Survey, 2011-15.

Note: Data have been suppressed for estimates that are not reliable.

White families were more likely to have higher incomes. One in three white families had annual incomes above \$200,000. Twenty-two percent of Asian or Pacific Islander families, 14 percent of black families, and 9 percent of Hispanic families had incomes above \$200,000.

The poverty rates for whites (3 percent) and Asians or Pacific Islanders (6 percent) were at or below the rate for the county (6 percent), but the rates for blacks (10 percent), Hispanics (11 percent), and immigrants (9 percent) were above the county rate. Poverty was most prevalent in Mason (12 percent), where the poverty rates were above the county averages for all racial and ethnic groups. In an equitable Fairfax County, 20,000 more immigrants and 14,000 more Hispanic, 7,000 more black, and 6,000 more Asian or Pacific Islander residents would live above the federal poverty level, with more than half the gains for Hispanics and 30 percent for blacks in Lee and in Mason.

The child poverty rate was higher for blacks (4 times) and for Hispanics (3.5 times) than that for whites (4 percent). The child poverty rate for Asians or Pacific Islanders (6 percent) was just above that for whites. As with poverty overall, child poverty was highest in Lee and in Mason.

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*In an equitable Fairfax County, an additional 13,000 Hispanic families, 8,000 Asian or Pacific Islander families, and 7,000 black families would have annual incomes above \$75,000. And 20,000 more immigrants and 14,000 more Hispanic, 7,000 more black, and 6,000 more Asian or Pacific Islander residents would live above the federal poverty level.*

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## Employment

Although annual incomes for black and Hispanic families were the lowest among racial and ethnic groups, the employment rates for 16- to 64-year-olds were similar between groups, with whites, blacks, and Hispanics all between 77 and 78 percent. The Asian or Pacific Islander employment rate (73 percent) was below the county average (77 percent).

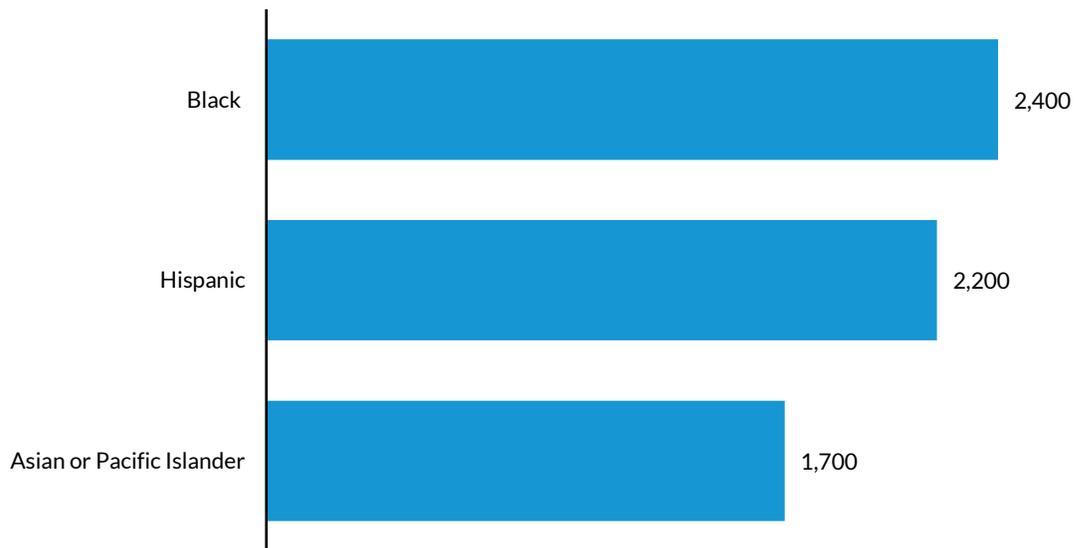
When looking at the population age 16 and older in the labor force, which includes only people who are employed or actively looking for work (unemployed), inequities in employment are revealed. Blacks (8 percent) and Hispanics (6 percent) had the highest unemployment rates, compared with 4 percent for whites, and 5 percent for Asians or Pacific Islanders. In an equitable Fairfax County, 2,400 more black residents, 2,200 more Hispanic residents, and 1,700 more Asian or Pacific Islander residents would be employed (figure 9).

Between racial and ethnic groups, the share of the population age 16 and older working full time was comparable. Most were around the county average (51 percent), with slightly higher rates for black (56 percent) and Hispanic (54 percent) residents. Black and Hispanic full-time workers were

more likely to earn less than \$35,000, roughly half the annual income needed to earn a living wage (figure 10). About 1 in 10 white residents age 16 and older in Fairfax County working full time earned less than \$35,000, compared with 1 in 5 Asian or Pacific Islander residents, 1 in 4 black residents, and almost 1 in 2 Hispanic residents. In an equitable Fairfax County, 26,000 fewer Hispanics, 10,000 fewer Asians or Pacific Islanders, and 7,000 fewer blacks working full time would have earnings below \$35,000.

FIGURE 9

**Increase in the Number of Employed People with Equity in Fairfax County  
2011-15**

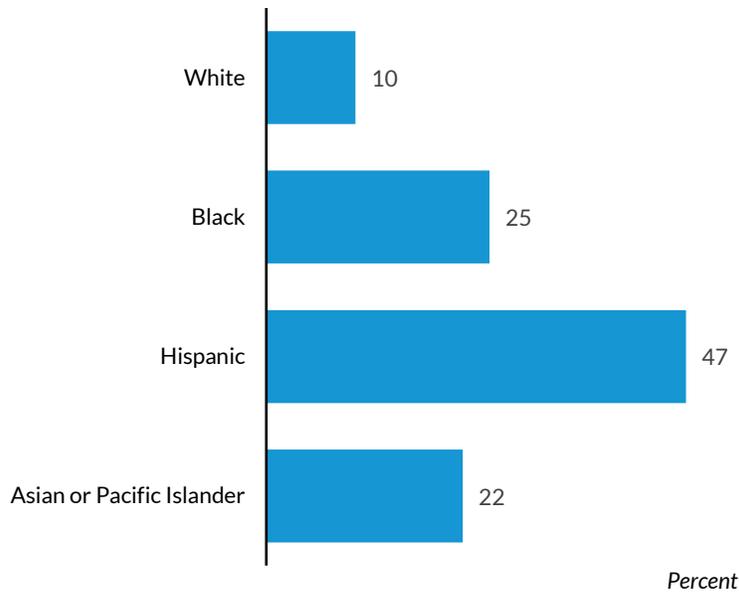


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Source: American Community Survey, 2011-15.

FIGURE 10

**Share of Population Working Full Time with Earnings below \$35,000  
2011-15**



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Source: American Community Survey, 2011-15.

There were similar inequities for people working full time and earning less than \$75,000 annually. More than 8 in 10 Hispanic residents, 6 in 10 black residents, and 5 in 10 Asian or Pacific Islander residents working full time did not earn this living wage, compared with fewer than 4 in 10 white residents. In an equitable Fairfax County, an additional 30,000 Hispanic residents, 12,000 Asian or Pacific Islander residents, and 12,000 black residents would earn a living wage.

Some of the income inequities may be attributable to occupational differences. About two-thirds of whites worked in management, business, science, or art occupations. About one-third of Hispanics worked in service occupations; 19 percent worked in natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations; and 16 percent worked in sales and office occupations. For blacks, about 48 percent worked in management, business, science, or art occupations; 22 percent worked in sales and office occupations; and 19 percent worked in service occupations. More than half of Asians or Pacific Islanders worked in management, business, science, or art; 21 percent worked in sales and office occupations; and 15 percent worked in service occupations.

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*In an equitable Fairfax County, 26,000 fewer Hispanics, 10,000 fewer Asians or Pacific Islanders, and 7,000 fewer blacks working full time would have earnings below \$35,000.*

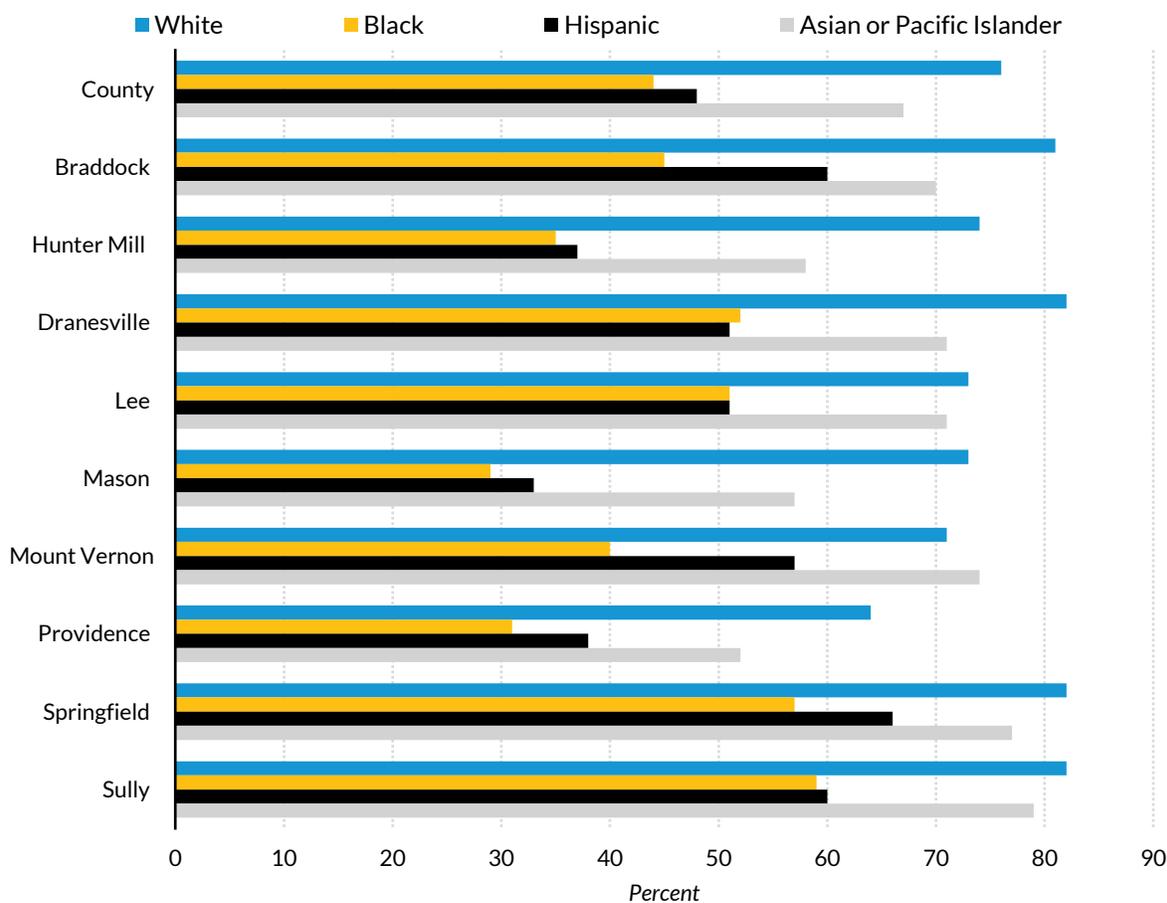
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# Homeownership and Mobility

The homeownership rate for Fairfax County was 68 percent. Blacks had the lowest homeownership rate (44 percent), followed by Hispanics (48 percent), Asians or Pacific Islanders (67 percent), and whites (76 percent). Mason had the lowest homeownership rates (56 percent) and had some of the lowest rates for most racial and ethnic groups, though the homeownership rate for whites was only slightly below average, at 73 percent (figure 11). Providence also had lower homeownership rates (56 percent) and was reflected in lower homeownership across all racial and ethnic groups. In an equitable Fairfax County, 12,500 more Hispanics would be homeowners, as would 12,000 more blacks and 5,500 more Asians or Pacific Islanders. Similarly, Mason would see the largest increase of any district for Hispanic homeowners, Mount Vernon would have the largest increase in homeownership for blacks, and Providence would have the largest increase for Asians and Pacific Islanders.

FIGURE 11

Homeownership Rate by Supervisor District in Fairfax County  
2011-15



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Source: American Community Survey, 2011-15.

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*In an equitable Fairfax County, 12,500 more Hispanics would be homeowners, as would 12,000 more blacks and 5,500 more Asians or Pacific Islanders.*

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About 14 percent of Fairfax County residents moved in the previous year, comparable with the national rate of 15 percent. Mobility was slightly higher in Providence (18 percent). Blacks had the highest mobility rates (18 percent), followed by Asians or Pacific Islanders (16 percent), Hispanics (14 percent), and whites (11 percent).

About 8 percent of Fairfax County residents had moved into the county from somewhere outside the county in the previous year. This was a little above the national rate of 6 percent. Blacks were the most likely to have moved into Fairfax from outside the county (9 percent), followed by Asians or Pacific Islanders (8 percent), whites (7 percent), and Hispanics (6 percent). As with overall mobility, Providence had the highest share of residents who moved in from outside the county (11 percent). Sully had the lowest rate at 5 percent.

## Notes

1. "One Fairfax: School Board and Board of Supervisors Joint Policy," Fairfax County Public Schools, accessed December 26, 2017, <https://www.fcps.edu/onefairfax>.
2. For more information on the board of supervisors, including the representatives, see "Board of Supervisors," Fairfax County Government, accessed December 1, 2017, <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/government/board/>; see also Fairfax County Government (n.d.).
3. Only 3 percent of blacks in Fairfax County in 2011–15 who identified as their race as black alone also identified as Hispanic.
4. Less than 1 percent of Asians and Pacific Islanders also identify as Hispanic.
5. There is more overlap between this category and the Hispanic category in Fairfax County than we find for blacks and for Asians and Pacific Islanders. About 93 percent of people identified as some other race, 43 percent of those who identified as American Indians, and 25 percent of those who identified as two or more races also identified as Hispanic.
6. Estimates have been suppressed if the coefficient of variation for the estimate is greater than 30 percent (US Census Bureau 2009).
7. Represents the living wage in 2015. See "Living Wage Calculation for Fairfax County, Virginia," Living Wage Calculator, accessed December 1, 2017, <http://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/51059>.
8. Earnings are discussed in the employment section. This section focuses on all income for a family. The American Community Survey tabulations do not break out income at \$69,000, so we used \$75,000 as the closest proxy.

## References

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.

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## About the Authors



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**Lily Posey** is a research assistant in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center. Her research interests include homelessness and housing instability, housing policies and programs, and the intersection of housing with health and economic mobility.

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