



Where Immigrants Live and Find Community in Philadelphia

The neighborhoods, services, and places that support the city's immigrant households

Overview

In order to thrive, city residents—foreign-born and U.S.-born alike—need safe neighborhoods with accessible amenities, strong social networks, and sufficient economic opportunities.¹ Are parks, schools, and libraries nearby? Are jobs and services accessible? Are neighborhoods welcoming and easy to navigate physically and linguistically? Making a home in a new city means learning unfamiliar places and finding supportive networks—or building new ones, if necessary.

Immigrants' neighborhoods—areas where foreign-born residents are very highly concentrated, relative to the rest of city—are found mostly in pockets of Northeast, Southwest, and South Philadelphia, according to The Pew Charitable Trusts' analysis of census and city data. The strength and accessibility of these neighborhoods can shape foreign-born residents' experiences, economic security, and ultimately whether they and their children remain in the city and contribute to its future.

Majority of immigrants live in relatively safe neighborhoods

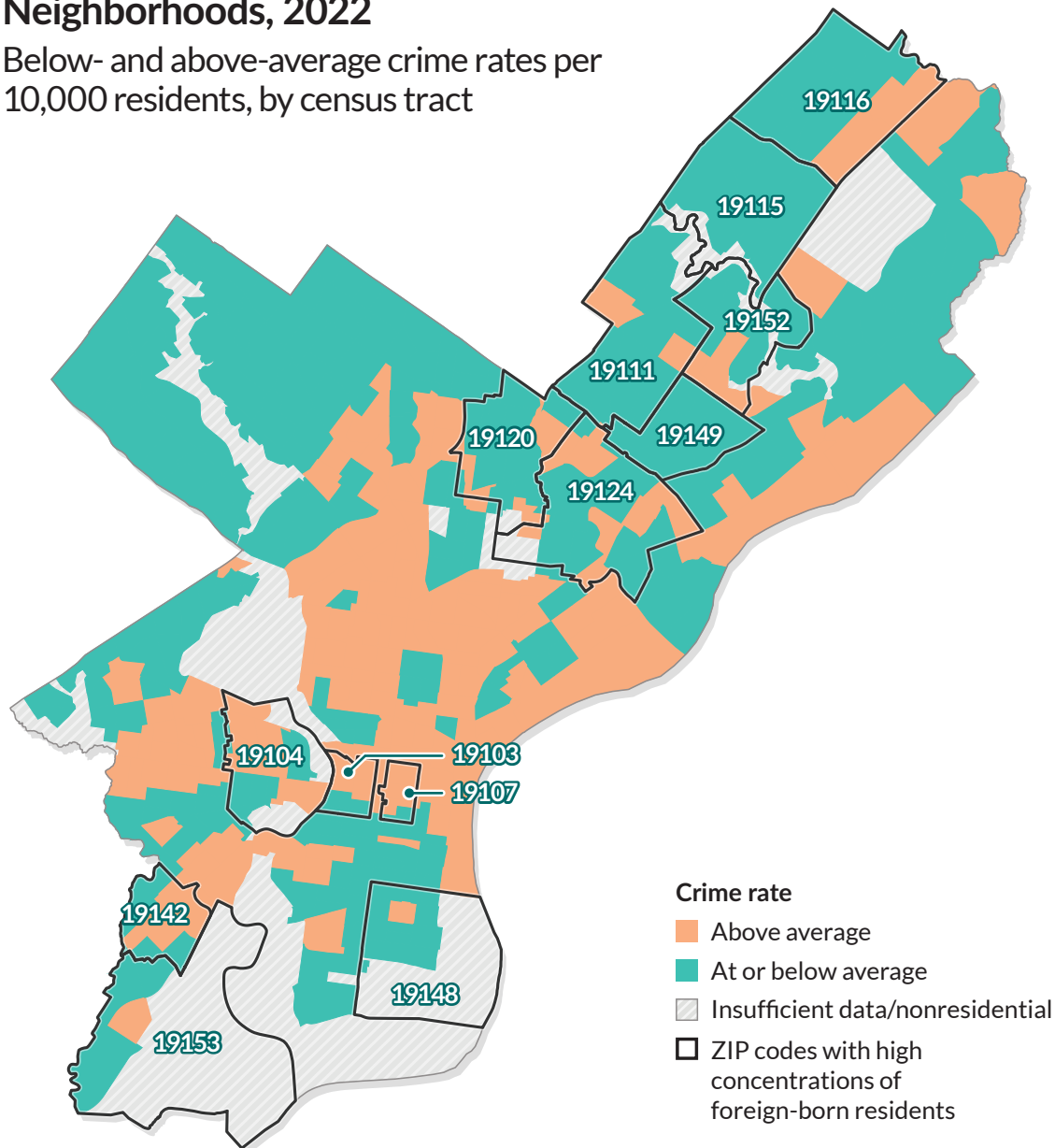
According to the U.S. Department of Justice, "community safety is achieved when community members live in peace, harmony, and mutual respect and when [individuals] and community groups feel that they personally can prevent and control crime."² Crime statistics are one way to measure community safety.

Three-quarters of Philadelphia's foreign-born residents (74% of 246,600 residents in 2022, the most recent year for which uniform data is available) lived in census tracts where the crime rate was lower than the citywide average. In comparison, around two-thirds (66%) of U.S.-born residents lived in areas with below-average crime rates, according to Pew's analysis of data from the Philadelphia Police Department and the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey.³ Figure 1 shows tracts with either below- or above-average crime rates, along with the 13 ZIP code areas that had the highest concentration of foreign-born residents.

Figure 1

Crime Rates in Philadelphia's Immigrant Neighborhoods, 2022

Below- and above-average crime rates per 10,000 residents, by census tract



Note: Overall crime includes both violent and nonviolent crimes per 10,000 residents in the tract where the incident occurred.

Sources: Philadelphia Police Department crime data, 2022; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, five-year estimates, 2018-22, Table DP02: Selected Social Characteristics

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An important aspect of personal or neighborhood safety, particularly for immigrants, is how prevalent reported hate or bias incidents are in the community. In 2023, the Philadelphia Police Department received 110 reports of such incidents, matching the 2019 total, following a three-year dip during the COVID-19 pandemic. The city's Commission on Human Relations categorized most of the hate and bias incidents as racial or ethnic, anti-Asian, anti-LGBT, antisemitic, or Islamophobic in nature. It categorized very few as explicitly anti-immigrant; officials said most cases involving immigrants fell into the racial or ethnic category. In 2021, approximately half of all reported hate and bias incidents were directed at Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders; in 2023, the largest share was categorized as antisemitism. Over the 2019-23 period, two-thirds of all hate and bias reports came from police districts in Center City, Northeast, and South Philadelphia.

Commission officials and criminologists have concluded that hate and bias incidents, like all incidents targeting immigrants, are underreported because of some immigrants' distrust of authorities, especially among those in the country without legal status.⁴ That could make the crime or incident rate appear lower than it actually is. Seeking to engender more trust and encourage crime reporting, the city's Commission on Human Relations says it increased its outreach and collaboration in recent years with community and ethnic groups. It was unclear what effect, if any, the outreach may have had on the number of incidents reported.

"We do get reports of violence, but the majority of hate [or bias] incidents reported in Philadelphia against immigrants are speech-related—like slurs—or property crimes," the commission's deputy director, Randy Duque, told Pew. He added that "violence against immigrants ... does exist. It's just not nearly the same intensity or seriousness as what gets reported on the news on the national level."

Concentrated communities

While Philadelphia's relatively affordable housing may have drawn many immigrants from other U.S. cities, data suggests that physical safety, social networks, cultural and linguistic affinity, and access to amenities and income opportunities—among other factors—have driven the choice of neighborhood for certain groups. Pew's analysis of American Community Survey data shows that immigrants of some nationalities are more likely than other groups to be concentrated in just a handful of the city's census tracts.

Table 1 lists the 10 nationalities with the greatest concentration of foreign-born residents living in any pocket of the city, defined as 20 or fewer census tracts out of 408 tracts citywide. (This definition was created by the University of Pennsylvania's Fels Institute of Government. See methodology for additional details.)

By this measure, people from Ukraine had the most concentrated population in the 2018-22 period, followed by those from Brazil and Cambodia. The city's largest foreign-born groups by nationality—those born in China and the Dominican Republic—were much less likely to live in clustered communities.

Concentrated communities may provide immigrants with opportunities for social and economic mobility and can increase a newly established household's sense of safety, although evidence is mixed on how these communities may also delay some foreign-born residents' integration into the broader U.S. (or Philadelphia) economy.⁵

Table 1

Top 10 Concentrated Immigrant Communities in Philadelphia, 2018-22

Percentage of each group living in just 20 census tracts

Top countries of origin	Total number of immigrants in Philadelphia	Percentage of group's Philadelphia population in top 20 census tracts	Ranking of concentrated population
Ukraine	6,500	82%	1
Brazil	5,700	74%	2
Cambodia	5,700	69%	3
Haiti	6,900	59%	4
Mexico	7,800	58%	5
India	12,500	57%	6
Dominican Republic	22,800	53%	7
Jamaica	9,300	48%	8
China	24,400	48%	9
Vietnam	12,100	47%	10

Note: Population totals are rounded to the nearest 100 and have margins of error ranging from plus or minus 1,000 for smaller groups to plus or minus 2,300 for some larger groups.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, five-year estimates, 2018-22, Table B05006: Place of Birth for the Foreign-Born Population in the United States

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Building social networks

Nonprofit organizations offer a way for immigrants to build and support social networks; they help households access basic needs like food and health care, and they also host cultural programs.

In 2022, some 61 nonprofit groups were operating in Philadelphia under the IRS categories “ethnic, immigrant centers and services” and “cultural, ethnic awareness.” Two-thirds of them were created since 2010, an indicator of steadily rising demand for their services.⁶ (The count excludes organizations that do not file IRS Form 990, such as informal all-volunteer groups. It also excludes religious, business, and employment groups, as well as broader community-based organizations that provide supports that also benefit immigrants. See methodology for more details.)

“Organizations like The Welcoming Center and I Belong Philly help us build confidence and shape new abilities, overcome fear, and connect with key leaders, institutions, and each other,” Silvia Roldan, an event organizer with the grassroots volunteer-led cultural group I Belong Philly and a native of Ecuador, said in an interview with Pew. “Integrating into the community is a very important part of the immigrant’s successful transition to life in the U.S. More than anything, we want to feel safe and heard.”

Immigrant concentration and livability

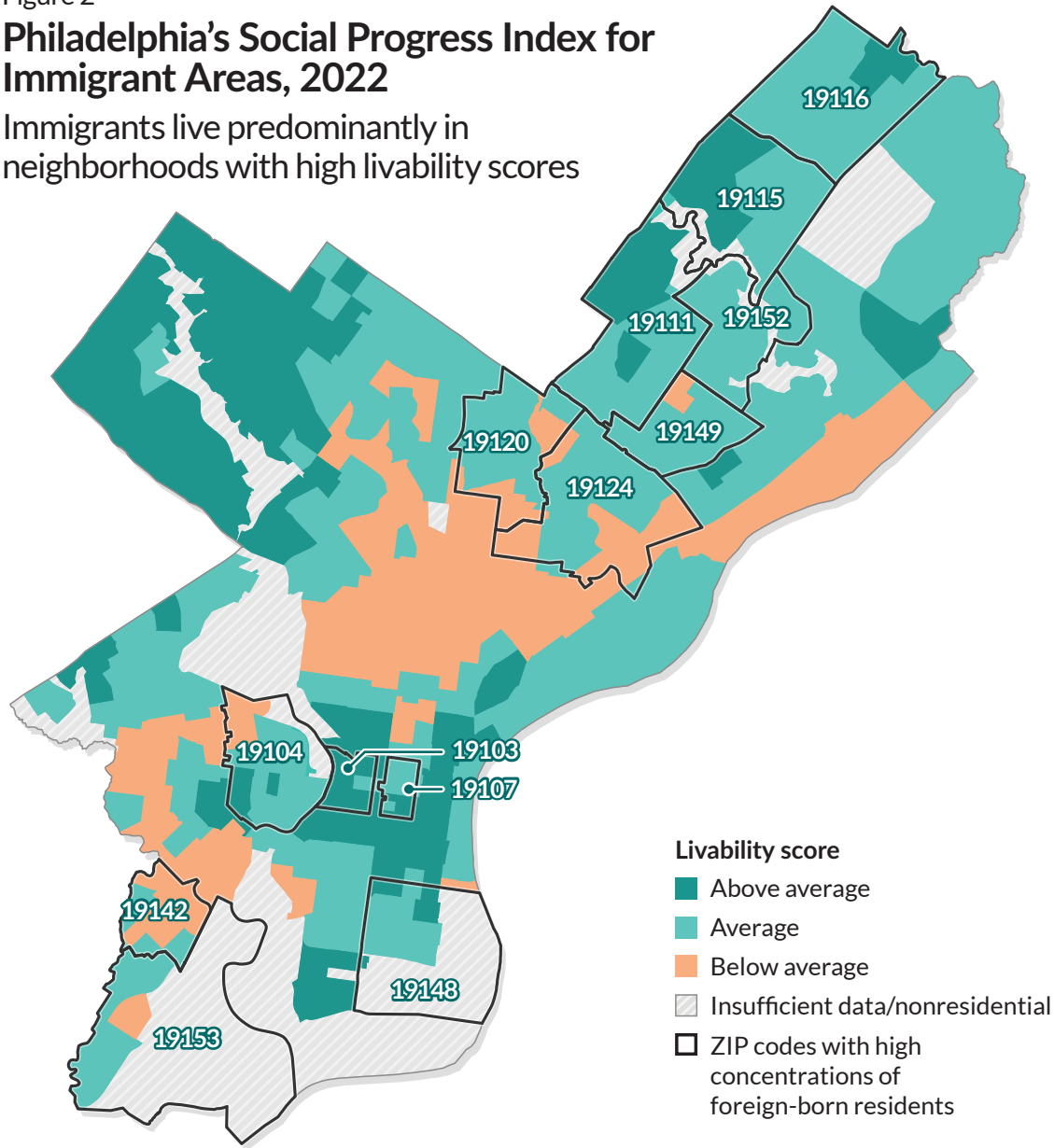
In 2023, the Philadelphia city controller’s office launched a tool called ProgressPHL to analyze how “a city works or does not work for its residents.”⁷ ProgressPHL relies on the city’s Social Progress Index data and its three main indicators—basic human needs, foundations of well-being, and opportunity—to create a livability index. According to Pew’s analysis of data from the ProgressPHL tool and the census, in 2022, 84.7% of immigrants lived in areas with an average or above-average livability score. (See methodology for more details.)

However, the city’s Social Progress Index data also hints at mixed conditions in the 13 ZIP codes that had the highest concentrations of immigrants in 2022. Some of those areas had high scores under the basic human needs indicator, which considers nutrition and basic medical care, water and sanitation, shelter, and personal safety. At the same time, areas with high concentrations of foreign-born residents had lower livability scores than other areas under the opportunity indicator, which includes personal rights, freedom and choice, inclusiveness, and access to advanced education. Some of the ZIP codes with Philadelphia’s highest concentration of immigrants—in Northeast Philadelphia—had above-average livability scores compared with ZIP codes in West and Southwest Philadelphia with high concentrations of immigrants. (See Figure 2.) The findings suggest that there are benefits for immigrants who congregate closely, although they still face other difficulties.

Figure 2

Philadelphia's Social Progress Index for Immigrant Areas, 2022

Immigrants live predominantly in neighborhoods with high livability scores



Sources: ProgressPHL Map, 2023; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, one-year estimates, 2022, Table DP02: Selected Social Characteristics

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Philadelphia is shaping—and being shaped by—immigrants

The communities where immigrants settle are shaping not just their lives but also the contours of city life for all Philadelphians. From finding and creating tight-knit neighborhoods and expansive social networks to navigating and making use of city and civic organizations' services, immigrant groups are adapting to Philadelphia and leaving their mark on the city.

A companion piece in this series looks in greater detail at the composition and conditions of immigrant-led households. For additional insights about Philadelphia's immigrants, view the [entire series](#).

Endnotes

- 1 Domenic Vitiello and Thomas J. Sugrue, eds., *Immigration and Metropolitan Revitalization in the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).
- 2 “Balanced and Restorative Justice Practice: Community Safety,” Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh176/files/pubs/implementing/safety.html>.
- 3 Rate is based on all reported crimes, including violent, nonviolent, and property crimes, divided by population in census tracts and citywide. See methodology for details.
- 4 Carmen M. Gutierrez and David S. Kirk, “Silence Speaks: The Relationship Between Immigration and the Underreporting of Crime,” *Crime and Delinquency* 63, no. 8 (2017): 926-50, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6699778/pdf/nihms-1035006.pdf>.
- 5 Simone Schüller and Tanika Chakraborty, “Ethnic Enclaves and Immigrant Economic Integration,” IZA World of Labor, 2022, <https://wol.iza.org/articles/ethnic-enclaves-and-immigrant-economic-integration/long>. See also Mario Alberto Viveros Espinoza-Kulick; Maura Fennelly; Kevin Beck; Ernesto Castañeda, “Ethnic Enclaves,” *Oxford Bibliographies* (2021): <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0257.xml?p=emailAMs94UgLWI9z6&d=/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0257.xml>.
- 6 Pew analysis of IRS data obtained and processed by the data platform CausalQ, found at <https://www.causeiq.com>.
- 7 “A New Online Dashboard Shows How Philly Neighborhoods Compare on Public Safety, Sanitation, and Beyond,” Tom MacDonald, WHYY.org, March 22, 2023, <https://whyy.org/articles/philly-city-controller-dashboard-compares-neighborhoods-public-safety-sanitation/>.

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