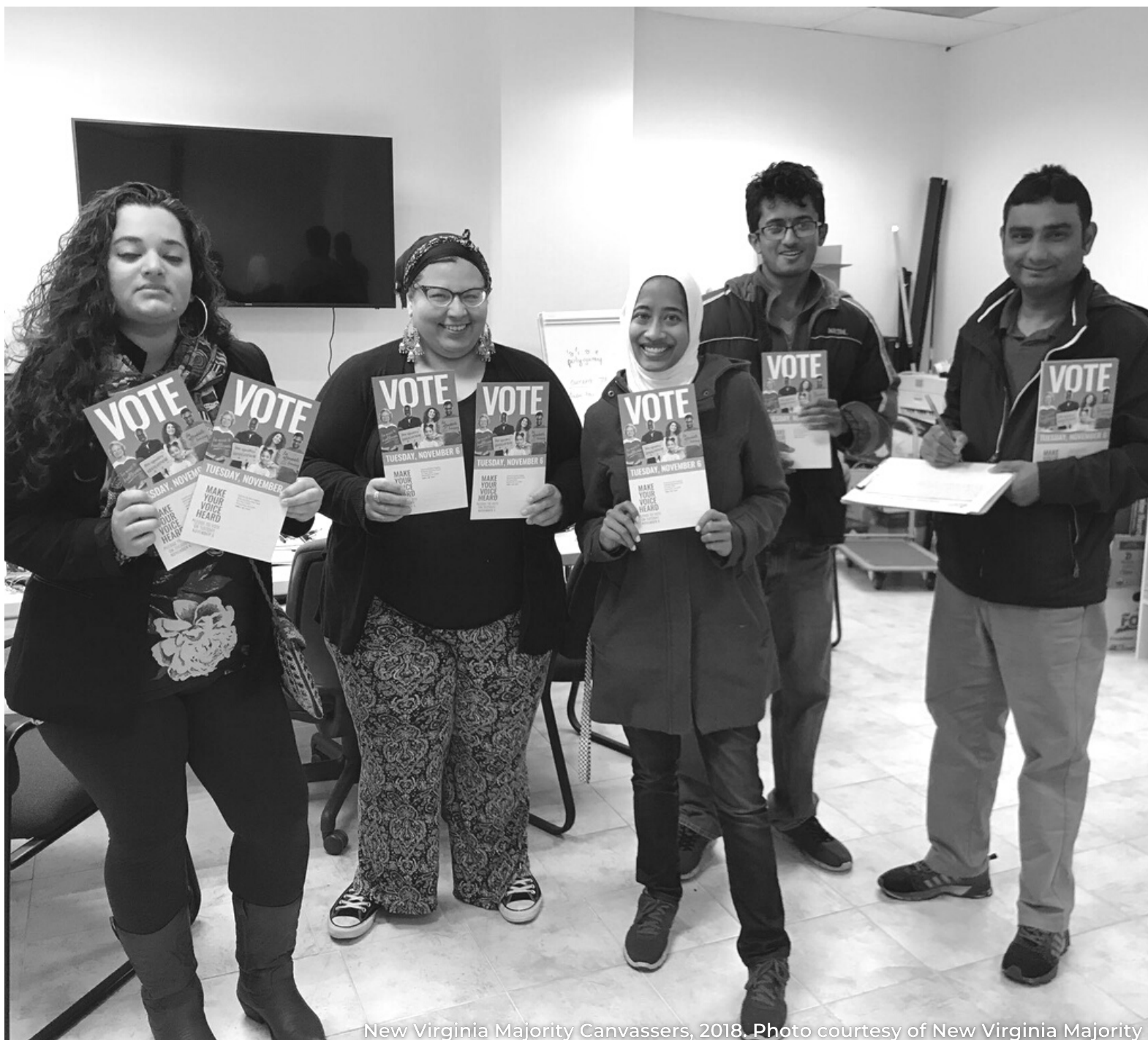


# New American Voters in Virginia

*Building the Electoral Power of Naturalized Voters*



New Virginia Majority Canvassers, 2018. Photo courtesy of New Virginia Majority



**NEW VIRGINIA MAJORITY**  
*DEMOCRACY. JUSTICE. PROGRESS.*



**Hamkae**  
Center

**NPNA**  
NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP  
FOR NEW AMERICANS

**SEIU**

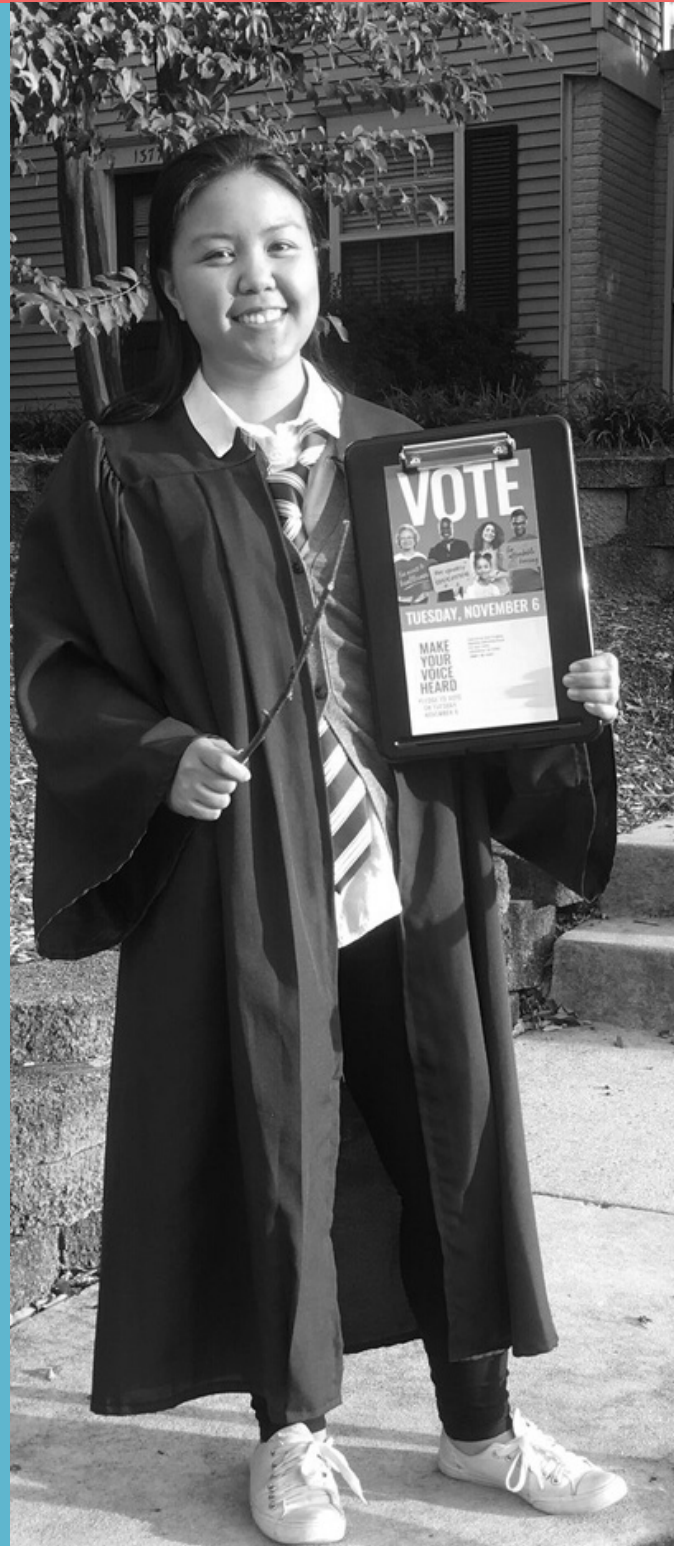


US IMMIGRATION  
POLICY CENTER

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New Virginia Majority Community Organizer Canvassing in Costume, Oct 2018. Photo courtesy of New Virginia Majority

# Executive Summary

The high stakes of the 2022 U.S. midterm elections showcase the urgency of engaging all eligible voters to ensure a fully participatory, representative democracy. In Virginia, a bloc of New American Voters — recently naturalized citizens that have earned the right to vote — has the potential to play an outsized role in the outcomes of critical federal and state races. This voting bloc is multiracial, multigenerational, geographically diverse, and majority female. New American Voters hold distinct ideologies, experiences, and viewpoints, and will be motivated by a variety of issues this November.

Virginia will be one of the most critical states during the November 2022 midterm elections and New American Voters can sway the outcome. Virginia ranks 10th in the nation according to the New American Voters Impact Model, which was created by the National Partnership for New Americans (NPNA) and the U.S. Immigration Policy Center (USIPC) at the University of California, San Diego to showcase the potential of this critical voting bloc to influence the outcome of midterm elections in 50 states. This report offers data that illustrates how New American Voters can have an outsized impact.

- Virginia is home to 101,190 citizens naturalized between 2016 and 2020, representing nearly one-quarter of the state's 451,138-vote margin of victory in the 2020 presidential election.
- Newly naturalized citizens in Virginia are racially and ethnically diverse, with approximately 47 percent from Asia, 27 percent from the Americas, 17 percent from the African continent, and 8 percent from Europe.
- Approximately 65 percent of Virginia's newly naturalized citizens are under the age of 45 and nearly 56 percent are women.
- The Washington-Arlington-Alexandria metropolitan area, which includes Virginia, DC, Maryland, and West Virginia, has the state's highest concentration of naturalized citizens, at nearly 860,000, followed by the Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News metropolitan area, which includes Virginia and North Carolina, with nearly 76,000, and then the Richmond metropolitan area with approximately 48,000.

Virginia's cohort is part of an estimated 5.19 million newly naturalized citizens across the U.S., according to New American Voters 2022: Harnessing the Power of Naturalized Citizens, a report released by NPNA, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), APIAVote, and USPIC. The power of this potential voting bloc is determined by individuals' ability to both register and vote this November.

This electoral season presents many challenges, including the need for organizations to adapt their voter engagement work to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, language access issues, and ongoing efforts to tighten and restrict access to voting, particularly targeting voters of color. Another challenge that has emerged in recent years is the increasing backlog and processing delays of citizenship applications.

According to the latest data from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), there are over 672,000 pending citizenship applications nationwide, with 4,604 applications backlogged in USCIS' office in Norfolk, Virginia.<sup>1</sup> While the national average processing delay is around eleven months, approximately 80 percent of applications are processed within 15.5 months in USCIS' Norfolk office. This means that immigrants who are eligible for citizenship and who would have otherwise naturalized and have had time to register to vote in this year's elections may not be able to do so given the naturalization application backlog.

Virginia-based organizations New Virginia Majority, Hamkae Center and NAKASEC, are partnering with NPNA's New American Voters Campaign, a non-partisan nationwide effort to address naturalization barriers and encourage newly naturalized citizens to register and vote.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Number of Form N-400 Application for Naturalization by Category of Naturalization, Case Status and USCIS Field Office Location, April 1, 2022 - June 30, 2022," accessed October 18, 2022, [https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/N400\\_performancedata\\_fy2022\\_qtr3.pdf](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/N400_performancedata_fy2022_qtr3.pdf).

# Methodology

This report is based on USCIS data on naturalizations that occurred from Fiscal Year 2016 through FY 2020 and naturalization applications that the agency approved in FY 2021.<sup>2</sup> Estimates for naturalizations during FY 2021 are based on previous spikes in naturalizations between FY 2019 and FY 2020, right before the presidential election.

“Newly naturalized citizens” are defined as those who have naturalized since FY 2016. “New American Voters” are defined as those who have naturalized since FY 2016 and can subsequently register to vote.

This report utilizes United Nations regional classifications to specify newly naturalized citizens' region of origin.<sup>3</sup> These classifications are Americas, Asia, Europe, Africa, and Oceania. All of the tables referenced throughout this report are based on USCIS data from 2016–2020. Additionally, data on naturalization gaps is based on the 2020 1-Year ACS.<sup>4</sup>

The New American Voters Impact Model (Figure 1) ranks states' relative “political importance” based on six factors: (1) newly naturalized citizens from 2016 to 2020 as a multiple of the state’s 2016 presidential vote margin; (2) the average presidential election margin in 2012, 2016, and 2020; (3) group density; (4) the presence of a competitive U.S. Senate race; (5) the presence of a competitive gubernatorial race; and (6) the presence of a competitive race for control of state legislative chambers. All of these factors are multiplied by each other in order to arrive at a raw score. That raw score is standardized on a 1 to 99 scale. The 15 highest-scoring states are termed “politically important states” throughout this report. A more in-depth explanation of the model factors can be found in NPNA’s companion national report.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See “Naturalizations,” U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, accessed May 9, 2022, <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/naturalizations>. “Immigration and Citizenship Data,” U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, accessed May 9, 2022, <https://www.uscis.gov/tools/reports-and-studies/immigration-and-citizenship-data>

<sup>3</sup> See “Countries or Areas,” United Nations Statistics Division, accessed May 9, 2022, <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/#geo-regions>.

<sup>4</sup> See “American Community Survey,” United States Census Bureau, accessed May 9, 2022, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>.

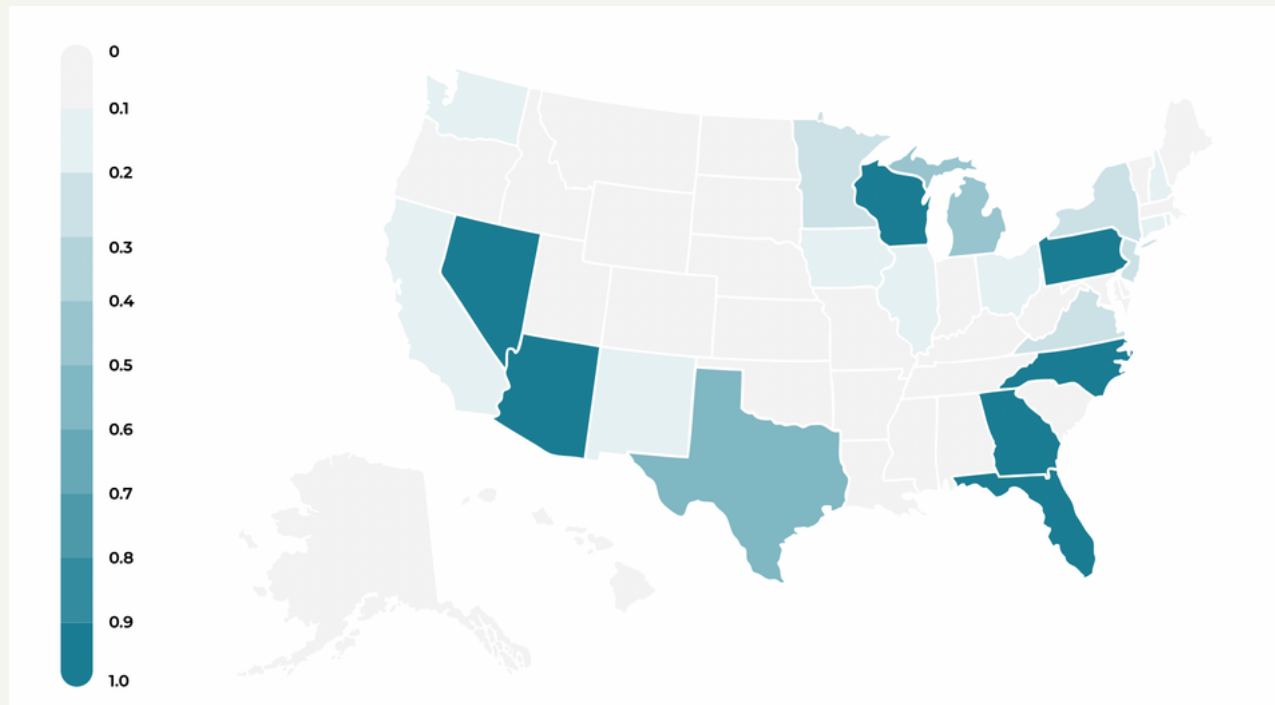
<sup>5</sup> National Partnership for New Americans, Service Employees International Union, U.S. Immigration Policy Center at the University of Virginia San Diego, and APIA Vote, “New American Voters 2022: Harnessing the Power of Naturalized Citizens,” July 2022, [https://newamericanvoters.org/assets/2022/07/NPNA\\_2022-New-American-Voters-Report.pdf](https://newamericanvoters.org/assets/2022/07/NPNA_2022-New-American-Voters-Report.pdf).



# WHY VIRGINIA IS SO IMPORTANT

There are more than 600,000 naturalized citizens in Virginia, accounting for more than seven percent of the state population. As Figure 2 shows, approximately one-fifth of all naturalized citizens in Virginia have naturalized since the 2016 presidential election.

**Figure 1: Politically Important States, according to the New American Voters Impact Model, 2022**  
*This map shows how states score in the NPNA New American Voters Impact Model*



**Figure 2: Virginia State Population Figures 2022**

TOTAL POPULATION	REGISTERED VOTERS	ALL NATURALIZED CITIZENS	NEWLY NATURALIZED CITIZENS 2016-2020
8,565,201	5,975,696 <sup>6</sup>	604,187	109,021

From 2016 through 2020, Virginia added an estimated 101,190 newly naturalized citizens, which is nearly one-quarter of the state's 451,138-vote margin of victory in the 2020 presidential election. Virginia's cohort is part of an estimated 5.19 million newly naturalized citizens across the U.S.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.elections.virginia.gov/resultsreports/registrationturnout-statistics/>.

<sup>7</sup> National Partnership for New Americans, Service Employees International Union, U.S. Immigration Policy Center at the University of California San Diego, and APIA Vote, "New American Voters 2022: Harnessing the Power of Naturalized Citizens," July 2022, [https://newamericanvoters.org/assets/2022/07/NPNA\\_2022-New-American-Voters-Report.pdf](https://newamericanvoters.org/assets/2022/07/NPNA_2022-New-American-Voters-Report.pdf).

# WHO ARE VIRGINIA'S NEW AMERICAN VOTERS?

Of the total number of persons who naturalized in Virginia from 2016 to 2020, approximately 47 percent are from Asia, which includes Asian and Pacific Islander countries, 27 percent are from the Americas, which includes Latin America and the Caribbean, approximately 17 percent are from the African continent, and approximately 8 percent are from Europe. (See Figure 3.)

**FIGURE 3: VIRGINIA NATURALIZED CITIZENS BY  
REGION OF ORIGIN 2016-2020**

REGION	NUMBER OF NEWLY NATURALIZED CITIZENS	PERCENTAGE OF NEWLY NATURALIZED CITIZENS
Asia	47,695	47%
Americas	27,382	27%
Africa	17,350	17%
Europe	8,272	8%
Oceania	306	0.3%
Other/Unknown	185	0.2%
Total 2016-2020	101,190	

# 27%

Newly Naturalized  
Citizens from the  
Americas

# 47%

Newly Naturalized  
Citizens from Asian  
and Pacific Islander  
Countries



Figure 4 shows the top 20 countries of origin for persons who naturalized in Virginia from 2016 to 2020. Newly naturalized citizens from India lead the way, followed by El Salvador, then the Philippines.

**FIGURE 4: VIRGINIA NEWLY NATURALIZED CITIZENS BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN, 2016-2020**

RANK	COUNTRY	TOTAL
1	India	10879
2	El Salvador	6482
3	Philippines	4929
4	Ethiopia	4326
5	Pakistan	3921
6	Korea, South	3786
7	China, People's Republic	3262
8	Vietnam	3206
9	Mexico	3099
10	Bolivia	2759
11	Ghana	2737
12	Peru	2643
13	Iraq	2190
14	Nepal	2161
15	Iran	2096
16	Afghanistan	2076
17	Egypt	1764
18	Bangladesh	1737
19	Colombia	1482
20	United Kingdom	1437

# 31%

Newly naturalized U.S. citizens  
35-45 years old

# 26%

Newly naturalized U.S. citizens  
25-34 years old

# 17%

Newly naturalized U.S. citizens  
45-55 years old

# 10%

Newly naturalized U.S. citizens  
55-65 years old

# 8%

Newly naturalized U.S. citizens  
18-24 years old

Approximately 65 percent of persons who naturalized in Virginia from 2016 to 2020 were below the age of 45 and nearly 56 percent were women. The full breakdown by age and gender is shown in Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Virginia Newly Naturalized Citizens By Age and Gender\* 2016-2020**

AGE	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL	Percent of Total
18-24 YEARS	4,207	4,334	8,541	8%
25-34 YEARS	15,417	10,938	26,355	26%
35-45 YEARS	17,496	14,061	31,557	31%
45-55 YEARS	9,433	8,188	17,621	17%
55-65 YEARS	5,703	4,279	9,982	10%
65 YEARS AND OLDER	4,175	2,959	7,134	7%
TOTAL	56,431 (55.8% of total)	44,759 (44.2% of total)	101,190	

\*USCIS does not collect data on transgender or non-binary individuals.



# WHERE ARE VIRGINIA'S NEW AMERICAN VOTERS?

Figure 6 shows the total number of naturalized citizens in metropolitan areas in Virginia. The Washington-Arlington-Alexandria metropolitan area, which includes Virginia, DC, Maryland, and West Virginia, has nearly 860,000 naturalized citizens, followed by the Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News metropolitan area, which includes Virginia and North Carolina with nearly 76,000 naturalized citizens, and then the Richmond metropolitan area with approximately 48,000 naturalized citizens.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 6: Virginia Naturalized U.S. Citizens By Metro Area and Region of Origin, 2022**

Metropolitan Area	Total	Africa	Americas	Asia	Europe	Oceania
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	859,861	142,198	233,766	410,853	70,656	2,388
Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News, VA-NC	75,553	4,795	22,425	38,174	9,595	564
Richmond, VA	47,816	3,386	14,510	19,792	9,961	167
Roanoke, VA	7,358	200	1,032	3,405	2,721	N/A
Harrisonburg, VA	4,899	N/A	1,553	2,604	742	N/A
Blacksburg-Christiansburg-Radford, VA	3,703	398	628	1,504	1,024	149
Lynchburg, VA	3,454	673	924	1,517	340	N/A

Note: This table includes figures of **all** naturalized citizens in named regions, not just newly naturalized.

<sup>8</sup> Estimates obtained from the 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-Year Public Use Microdata (PUM).



# ENGAGING VIRGINIA'S NEW AMERICAN VOTERS

The 2022 New American Voters campaign is a non-partisan nationwide effort coordinated by NPNA to encourage newly naturalized citizens to register and vote. Newly naturalized citizens in Virginia interested in becoming citizens or new voters can connect with the following NPNA member and partner organizations below for more information.

## Virginia Partners

**New Virginia Majority** started twelve years ago with the audacious goal of building a bloc of conscious, consistent voters to advance a new politics that is democratic, sustainable and just. We envision a Virginia that centers the needs and struggles of working class people, people of color, immigrants, women, and young people to build a real democracy rooted in racial and economic justice. Learn more at [www.newviriniamajority.org](http://www.newviriniamajority.org)

**Hamkae Center** develops holistic programs and campaigns that are guided by community members and meet immediate needs, while building Asian American community power to make long-term systemic changes that address the root causes of these needs and center human connections. Learn more at [hamkaecenter.org](http://hamkaecenter.org)

**NAKASEC** imagines a future in which low- and middle-income, immigrant, people of color, and marginalized communities are working together as the change-makers. We have transformed cultures, power relationships, systems, and policies in the United States, all in a broader global context. Learn more at [nakasec.org](http://nakasec.org)

## National Partners

**The National Partnership for New Americans (NPNA)** is a national multiethnic, multiracial organization that represents 60 of the largest regional immigrant and refugee rights organizations in 40 states. Its members provide large-scale services for the communities, to leverage their collective power and expertise for a national strategy. Learn more at [partnershipfornewamericans.org](http://partnershipfornewamericans.org)

**The Service Employees International Union (SEIU)** unites 2 million diverse members in the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico. SEIU members working in the healthcare industry, in the public sector and in property services believe in the power of joining together on the job to win higher wages and benefits and to create better communities while fighting for a more just society and an economy that works for all of us, not just corporations and the wealthy. Learn more at [www.seiu.org](http://www.seiu.org)

**The U.S. Immigration Policy Center (USIPC)** at UC San Diego was the lead author of this report in partnership with NPNA and SEIU. USIPC conducts and supports rigorous social science research to advance understanding of the foundations and consequences of U.S. immigration policy. Immigration has played an integral role in American history and is sure to feature prominently in America's future. But what should the immigration policies of our nation of immigrants be? The USIPC brings together leading academics, policy analysts, immigrant rights leaders, and policymakers across all levels of government to conceptualize, debate, and design a new U.S. immigration policy agenda that meets the demands of the 21st century. Learn more at [www.usipc.ucsd.edu](http://www.usipc.ucsd.edu)