



# Immigrants Fuel Growth in Philadelphia's Paschall-Elmwood and Mayfair Areas

State of the city's neighborhoods

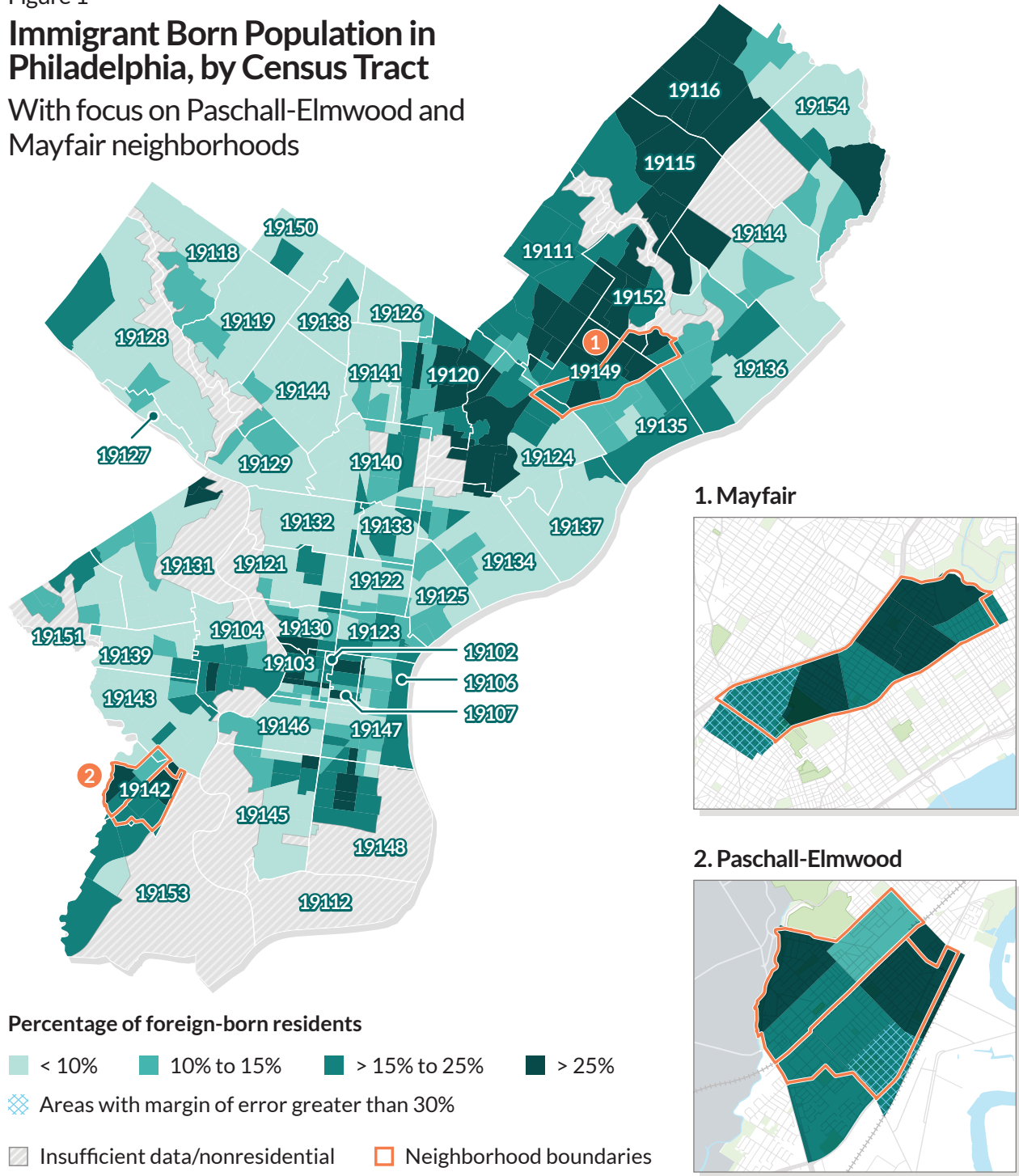
Immigrants have driven much of Philadelphia's population growth in the past two decades. As of 2022, nearly 16% of city residents were foreign-born, the highest percentage since the 1940s. For years, this increasing population has influenced the services offered by city government and nonprofit groups, the composition of classrooms and playgrounds, and the local economy. Although foreign-born residents live in every neighborhood throughout the city, the highest concentrations of immigrants are found in parts of Northeast, Southwest, and South Philadelphia, as well as sections of Center City and West Philadelphia.

The Pew Charitable Trusts set out to learn more about the city's immigrants by examining neighborhoods whose foreign-born populations have grown significantly: Mayfair in the Lower Northeast and Paschall-Elmwood in Southwest Philadelphia, each with about a quarter of residents born abroad. (See Figure 1.) The percentage growth of foreign-born residents in these neighborhoods far exceeds the citywide rate. (See Table 1.)

Figure 1

# Immigrant Born Population in Philadelphia, by Census Tract

With focus on Paschall-Elmwood and Mayfair neighborhoods



Notes: For this analysis, in defining Mayfair and Paschall-Elmwood, Pew used the neighborhood boundary map owned by Element 84, which was also involved with creating OpenDataPhilly. The neighborhoods map was created by Azavea in 2014, with input from the Philadelphia Police Department, a Philadelphia Inquirer map, and a historic map by Fredric M. Miller, Morris J. Vogel, and Allen F. Davis.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, five-year estimates, 2018-22, Table DP02, Selected Social Characteristics; Azavea, Philadelphia Maps and Geographic Information: Social & Cultural—Philadelphia Neighborhoods Map, 2014

Table 1

## Paschall-Elmwood, Mayfair, and Philadelphia Demographics

By foreign-born, limited English proficiency, and race and ethnicity

Neighborhood	Percentage who are foreign-born	Foreign-born population change (2013-17 to 2018-22)	Percentage of limited English proficient (LEP) population	Foreign-born population's racial composition			
				White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Asian, non-Hispanic	Hispanic or Latino (any race)
Paschall-Elmwood	24.9%	48.3%	14.9%	1.1%	74.6%	16.4%	7.4%
Mayfair	27.3%	62.0%	30.8%	13.8%	6.6%	38.2%	33.4%
Philadelphia	14.6%	10.8%	11.1%	20.1%	19.8%	34.1%	23.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, five-year estimates, 2013-17 and 2018-22.

Note: Data on limited English proficiency and racial composition for neighborhoods is by ZIP code—19142 for Paschall-Elmwood and 19149 for Mayfair.

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These neighborhoods have a higher percentage of foreign-born residents—and a larger percentage increase from 2013-17 to 2018-22—than the city as a whole. One of many major distinctions is that Mayfair has recently become a popular destination for immigrants, while Paschall-Elmwood has drawn immigrants for several decades.

### Paschall-Elmwood

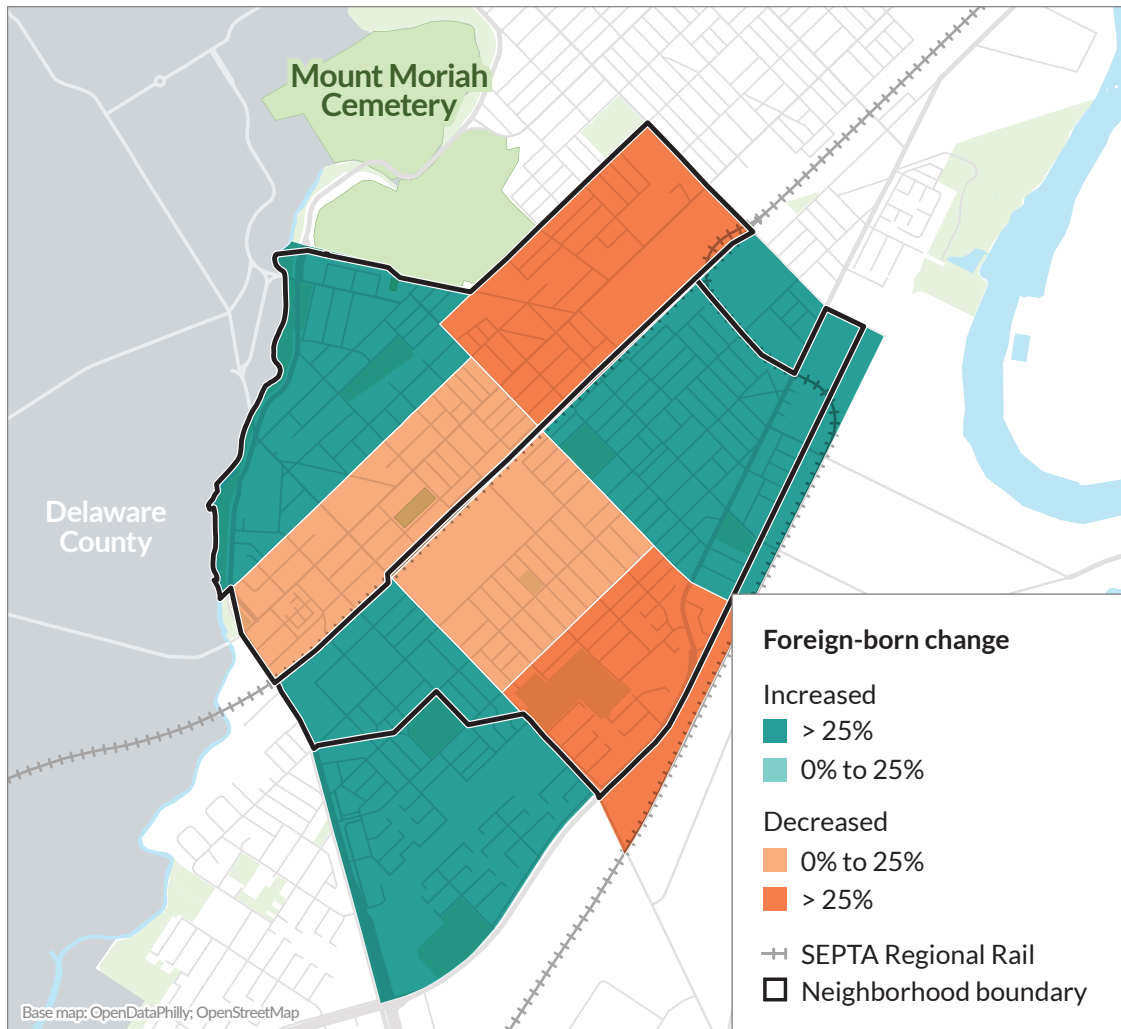
Home to about 34,000 residents, Southwest Philadelphia's Paschall-Elmwood neighborhood sits on the east side of Cobbs Creek, which separates it from Delaware County. The neighborhood's boundaries coincide with those of the 19142 ZIP code, and the area's housing stock consists predominantly of row homes.

SEPTA's Regional Rail divides the neighborhoods, with Paschall on the left, northwest of the tracks, and Elmwood on the right, to the southeast. Another rail line separates Elmwood from Eastwick and the former home of the Philadelphia Energy Solutions Refinery Complex. And Woodland Avenue, the main local business corridor, is lined with mixed-use row homes housing religious institutions, restaurants, and minimarkets—many of which provide globally inspired cuisine and services.

Paschall-Elmwood's foreign-born population increased 48% from 2017 to 2022. Some parts of the neighborhood experienced an increase of up to 125% in their share of foreign-born residents, while the share greatly decreased in other areas. More than 8,500 neighborhood residents—or about 25%—are foreign-born. Of them, 74.6% are Black or African American, 16.4% are Asian, 7.4% Hispanic, and about 1% non-Hispanic White. Figure 2 shows how the foreign-born population has changed throughout the neighborhood.

Figure 2

## Foreign-Born Change in Paschall-Elmwood 2013-17 and 2018-22



Note: The neighborhood boundary is represented by a black line. Census tracts do not always fit neighborhood boundaries perfectly.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, five-year estimates, 2013-17 to 2018-22, Table S0501, Selected Characteristics of the Native and Foreign-Born Population

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Philadelphia has more than 26,000 African-born residents, and more than 20% of them live in this community. About 66% of the neighborhood's foreign-born residents are originally from Africa, not including children of immigrants or later generations.

Voffee Jabateh, CEO of the African Cultural Alliance of North America (ACANA), a local nonprofit organization that supports immigrants, refugees, and other Philadelphia residents, said, "Students of African descent were drawn to the area in the 1980s for its affordability, and where others saw a dilapidated neighborhood, we saw a gold mine. Everything you see today, we built."

Liberia, Vietnam, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, and Honduras are the predominant countries of origin for Paschall-Elmwood residents. (See Table 2.) This list differs significantly from the citywide foreign-born population's top five countries of origin: China, the Dominican Republic, India, Vietnam, and Jamaica.

Table 2

## Top 5 Countries of Origin for Residents Born Outside the U.S., 2018-22

Percentage by country of origin

Country of origin	Paschall-Elmwood's immigrant population: share by country	Philadelphia's immigrant population: share living in Paschall-Elmwood by country
Liberia	29.5%	44.8%
Vietnam	10.2%	7.2%
Sierra Leone	9.1%	69.6%
Ethiopia	7.6%	45.9%
Honduras	5.0%	16.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, five-year estimates, 2018-22, Table B05006, Selected Characteristics of the Total and Native Populations

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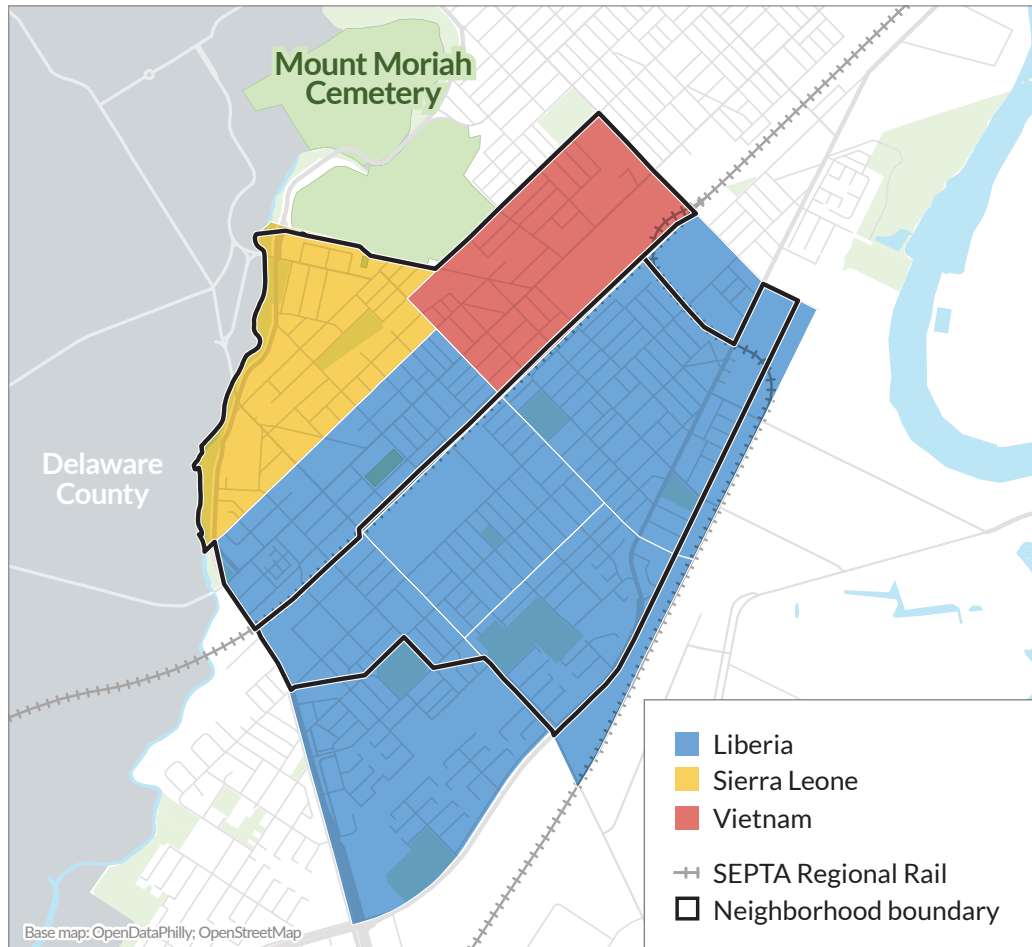
The geographic concentration of immigrant communities in Philadelphia varies by nationality. For example, Russians, Cambodians, and Africans are more highly concentrated, whereas Jamaicans, Koreans, and Germans tend to be more widely dispersed.<sup>1</sup> In 2022, about 48.6% of the city's immigrant population lived in 16% of its tracts, mainly in the Northeast, Center City, and Southwest Philadelphia.

Elmwood has historically attracted immigrants from Vietnam, Cambodia, and various African countries. A concentration of Vietnamese immigrants lives in the northeast corner of the neighborhood, near Mount Moriah Cemetery and adjacent to a Sierra Leonean community. (See Figure 3.) Many Liberians, meanwhile, live on the opposite side of the Regional Rail tracks, in Elmwood, toward the Grays Ferry neighborhood.

Right outside the city's boundaries, in Delaware County, lies a West African immigrant community double the size of Paschall-Elmwood's. These communities are connected geographically, culturally, and commercially, adjacent to one another and sharing parks, libraries, shops, and other public areas and amenities.

Figure 3

## Top Countries of Origin by Foreign-Born Population in Paschall-Elmwood 2018-22



Note: The neighborhood boundary is represented by a black line; landmarks include Mount Moriah Cemetery and the area's passenger rail lines.

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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An inability to speak English fluently can prevent many immigrants from achieving their goals in the United States. For that reason, the census asks whether residents over the age of 5 have limited English proficiency.

In Paschall-Elmwood, approximately 14.9% of residents age 5 and older—foreign- and native-born alike—speak English less than very well. That number is above the citywide figure of 11.1% and rises to 47.6% among foreign-born Philadelphians. It is worth noting that English is the official language of Liberia, Jamaica, and Sierra Leone—the top countries of origin for many of the neighborhood's immigrants. While many residents with a limited command of English reported speaking an African language, the census does not specify which languages they speak. This is a concern for organizations that serve African immigrants, along with the need to find other disaggregated data for their community.

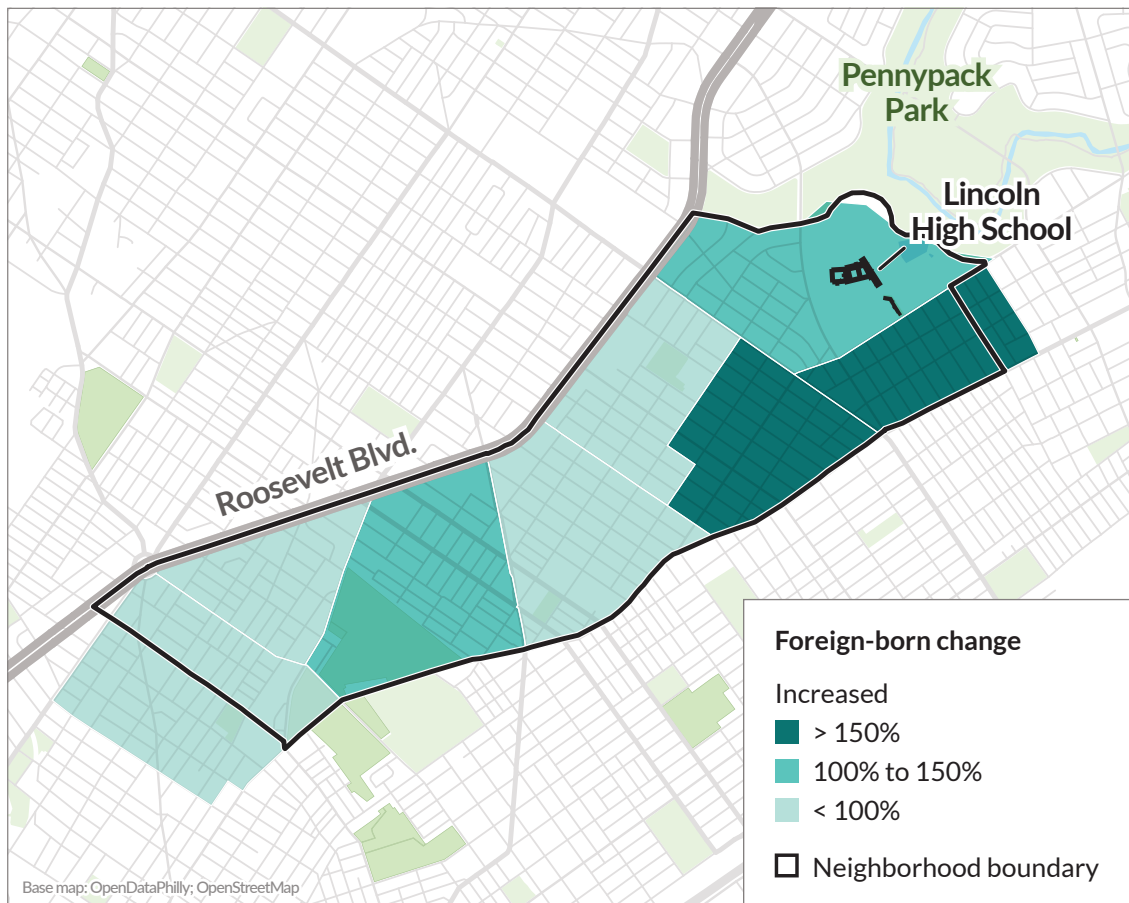
# Mayfair

Mayfair, in Lower Northeast Philadelphia's 19149 ZIP code, is a neighborhood of about 44,000 residents, separated from Oxford Circle by Roosevelt Boulevard. Frankford Avenue is its southern boundary and the dividing line between Mayfair and Tacony. The housing stock consists of medium-size row homes, sometimes attached in pairs, many with front lawns, garages, and driveways. And Castor Avenue, a prime business corridor in the area, is lined with Asian and Latin American restaurants, beauty stores, and produce markets.<sup>2</sup>

Some 27.3% of neighborhood residents are foreign-born—almost double the citywide percentage. Over the last decade, the foreign-born population in Mayfair has grown by 136.8%. The area's population grew 11%, while the U.S.-born population in the community fell by 8.1%—meaning that the growth was entirely attributable to the influx of foreign-born residents. (See Figure 4.)

Figure 4

## Foreign-Born Population Change in Mayfair 2013-17 and 2018-22



Notes: The neighborhood boundary is represented by a black line; landmarks include Roosevelt Boulevard and Lincoln High School. Census tracts do not always fit neighborhood boundaries perfectly.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, five-year estimates, 2013-17 to 2018-22, Table S0501, Selected Characteristics of the Native and Foreign-Born Populations

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Unlike in Paschall-Elmwood, Mayfair’s growth consists mainly of individuals with origins in the Americas and Asia.

Among foreign-born residents in the 19149 ZIP code, 38.2% identify as Asian, 33.4% as Hispanic, 13.8% as non-Hispanic White, and 6.6% as Black or African American. China, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Venezuela, and Vietnam are the top five countries of origin for Mayfair’s foreign-born population. (See Table 3.)

Table 3

## Top 5 Countries of Origin for Residents Born Outside the U.S., 2018-22

Percentage by country of origin

Country of origin	Mayfair’s immigrant population: share by country	Philadelphia’s immigrant population: share living in Mayfair by country
China	29.3%	13.4%
Dominican Republic	12.7%	6.7%
Brazil	6.2%	13.0%
Venezuela	5.8%	37.2%
Vietnam	5.4%	5.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, five-year estimates, 2018-22, Table B05006, Selected Characteristics of the Total and Native Populations

Note: China’s foreign-born population excludes individuals from Taiwan and Hong Kong.

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Donny Smith, executive director of the Mayfair Business Improvement District, said of the neighborhood, “Mayfair has become Philly’s very own Ellis Island, with so many immigrants coming directly to Philly from other countries. This has brought in new businesses to the corridor but also requires more effort from local organizations to integrate the new communities.”



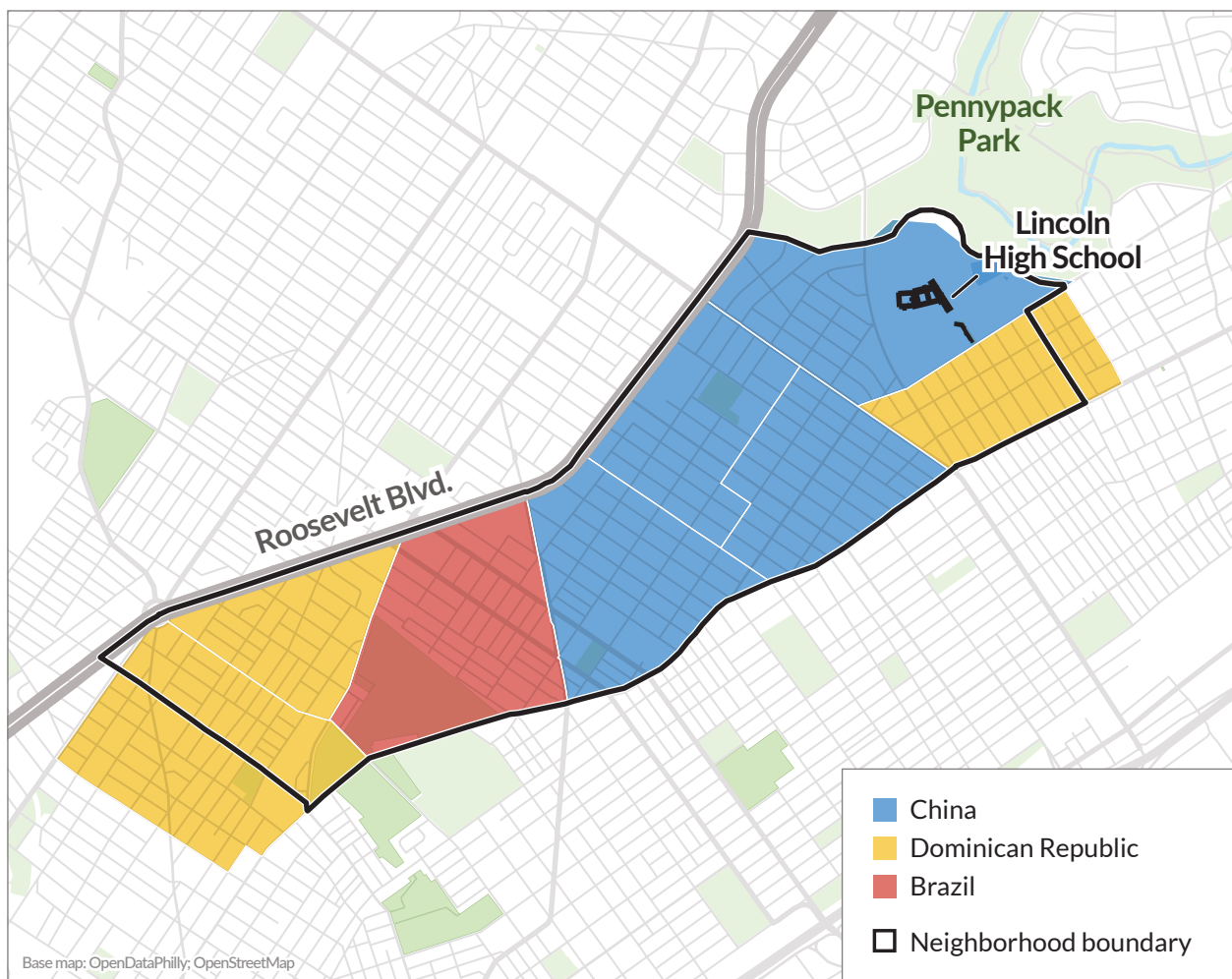
Mayfair also has a sizable number of Puerto Rican residents. Although not foreign-born, they have a distinct culture and language. In Mayfair, Puerto Rican-born residents represent about 9.7% of the overall population and 37.2% of its Latino residents.

With many residents, including U.S. citizens born in Puerto Rico, coming to the neighborhood from non-English-speaking countries, 30.8% of neighborhood residents reported speaking English less than very well. The top languages for those with limited English proficiency are Chinese, Spanish, and Portuguese.

Figure 5

## Top Countries of Origin by Foreign-Born Population in Mayfair, by Census Tract

2018-22



Note: The neighborhood boundary is represented by a black line; landmarks include Roosevelt Boulevard and Lincoln High School.

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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## Conclusion

As Philadelphia's foreign-born population grows, the city and its demographics are evolving. For example, the percentage of Philadelphians identifying as Asian or Latino citywide has nearly tripled since the 1990s.

The neighborhoods examined in this analysis—Paschall-Elmwood and Mayfair—were shaped by immigration: one over many decades; the other much more recently. Yet both are influenced in many ways by the new residents moving into and building lives in these communities. At the same time, immigrants' ability to integrate into the neighborhoods where they live hinges on government and nonprofit support.

Under then-Mayor Jim Kenney's administration, Philadelphia became the largest Certified Welcoming City in the country in 2023, a designation granted by Welcoming America, a national nonprofit encouraging inclusive policies that help immigrants and others thrive.<sup>3</sup> And the Kenney administration also made the Office of Immigrant Affairs permanent by amending the city's Home Rule Charter.

These recent shifts create an ideal opportunity for Philadelphia to think strategically about neighborhood development and the city's expanding immigrant community in places like Paschall-Elmwood, Mayfair, and beyond.

## Endnotes

- 1 Christopher Patusky and Johnny Ceffalio, "Recent Trends in Immigration to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Who Came and Where Do They Live?" University of Pennsylvania Fels Institute and Pennsylvania Department of Community Economic Development, 2004.
- 2 Latin America includes countries such as Brazil, Haiti, Jamaica, and others, according to U.S. Census Bureau data.
- 3 The Certified Welcoming designation is issued by Welcoming America, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization. More information about the program is available at <https://certifiedwelcoming.org>.

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**For more information, please visit: [pewtrusts.org](https://pewtrusts.org)**

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