

Junior Scholar Research Brief



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Financial Security and Immigrants' Legal Status: An Analysis of Net Worth in the United States

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Research conducted by Josefina Flores Morales, as part of the 2019 Junior Scholar Intensive Training (JSIT) research award competition. Please visit the [JSIT training page](#) for details on the training program.

Summary

Immigration status can have a significant role in an individual's ability to build wealth and financial security. This factor influences racial-ethnic subgroups differently among Black, White, Latinx, and Asian individuals. Age, like immigration status, shares a relationship with accumulating wealth. Together, these two factors have varying effects on racial-ethnic subgroups ability to build wealth in the U.S. Older adults and racial ethnic minorities are more likely to be financially insecure and live in poverty relative to their U.S.-born counterparts. This study seeks to highlight the differences of wealth accumulation between these subgroups and the roles that immigration status and age play when examining wealth gaps within these subgroups.

Key Research Findings

- Asian and Latinx respondents have the highest precarious and potentially undocumented immigration statuses.
- Among Asian individuals' precarious status migrants have the lowest net worth, followed by U.S.-born individuals, then legal permanent residents, while naturalized U.S. citizens had the highest net worth. White and Latinx follow a more linear pattern; as individuals' immigration statuses become more stable, their reported net worth increases.
- Black individuals with precarious immigration statuses had the lowest net worth within the study. U.S.-born Black individuals have the second highest level of net worth within the Black subgroup, while Foreign-born naturalized citizens had the highest level of net worth within the Black subgroup.
- The relationship between age and wealth is weakest for precarious and undocumented migrants. For U.S.-born individuals the relationship between age and wealth is strongest.

Implications for Policy and Practice

This study displays the consequences of long-term exclusion from stable immigration status and the ability to build wealth. The inequalities between racial-ethnic groups may continue to grow if individuals with precarious or undocumented immigration status face barriers to more stable immigration standing. The diminished ability to build wealth for these individuals may have devastating economic effects later in life. A majority of older adults rely on State-based programs such as Social Security for support through retirement. Immigrants who have precarious immigration statuses may have to rely solely on their diminished resources to survive, or that of their families due to lack of access to these programs. This implicates the wealth of both family members and the individual in their long-term and life course economic circumstances.

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