

FEDERAL WORKFORCE BRIEFING

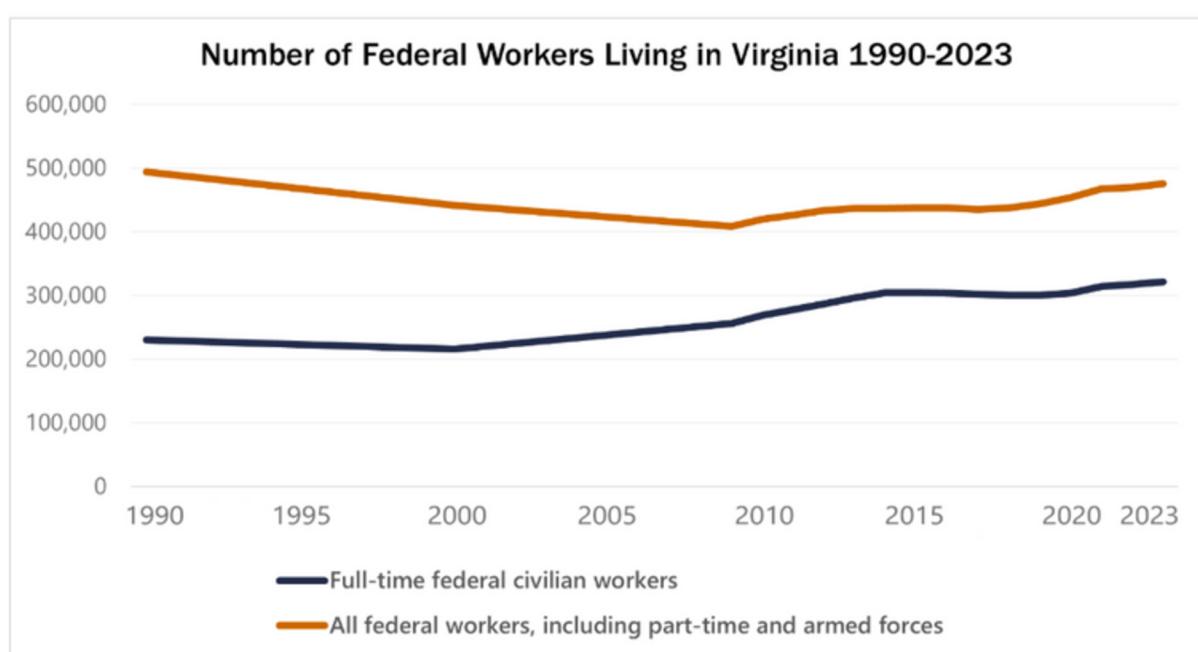
March 11, 2025



Weldon Cooper Center
for Public Service

Overview

Virginia ranks second in the nation for full-time federal civilian employees with 321,516 individuals, only trailing California by a few hundred. When part-time federal employees and the 130,751 active-duty military personnel residing in Virginia are included, the total federal workforce in the state reaches 475,713. Among the lower 48 states, Virginia ranks just behind Maryland in the share of its workforce employed by the federal government, with approximately one in nine Virginia workers holding federal jobs. These figures underscore the significant role that federal employment plays in Virginia's economy, enhanced further by the high median incomes of these workers compared to the private sector.



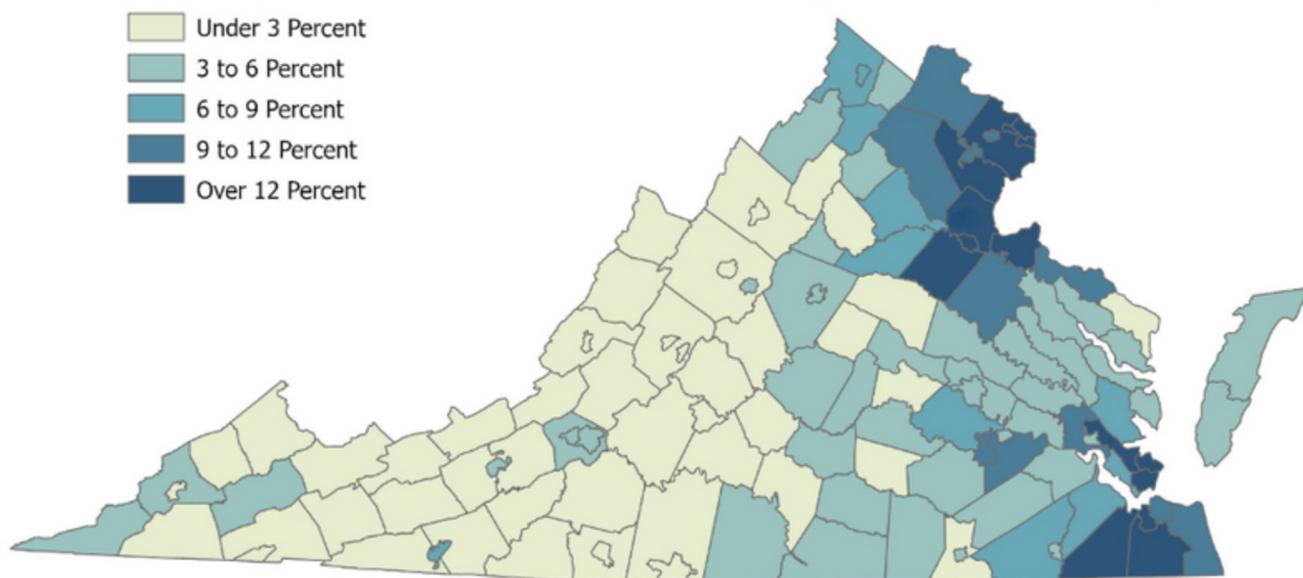
Federal Workforce Composition & Location

Virginia's federal workforce is deeply concentrated in regions with strong ties to the federal government. In Northern Virginia, proximity to Washington, D.C. contributes to one in six civilian workers being employed by the federal government, while Hampton Roads benefits from extensive military installations and shipyards that boost its federal employment—resulting in the region having the second-highest share of federal civilian workers among U.S. metro areas with over one million residents. Beyond these major metro areas, the Richmond region ranks sixth nationally for the proportion of its workforce employed by the federal government, and

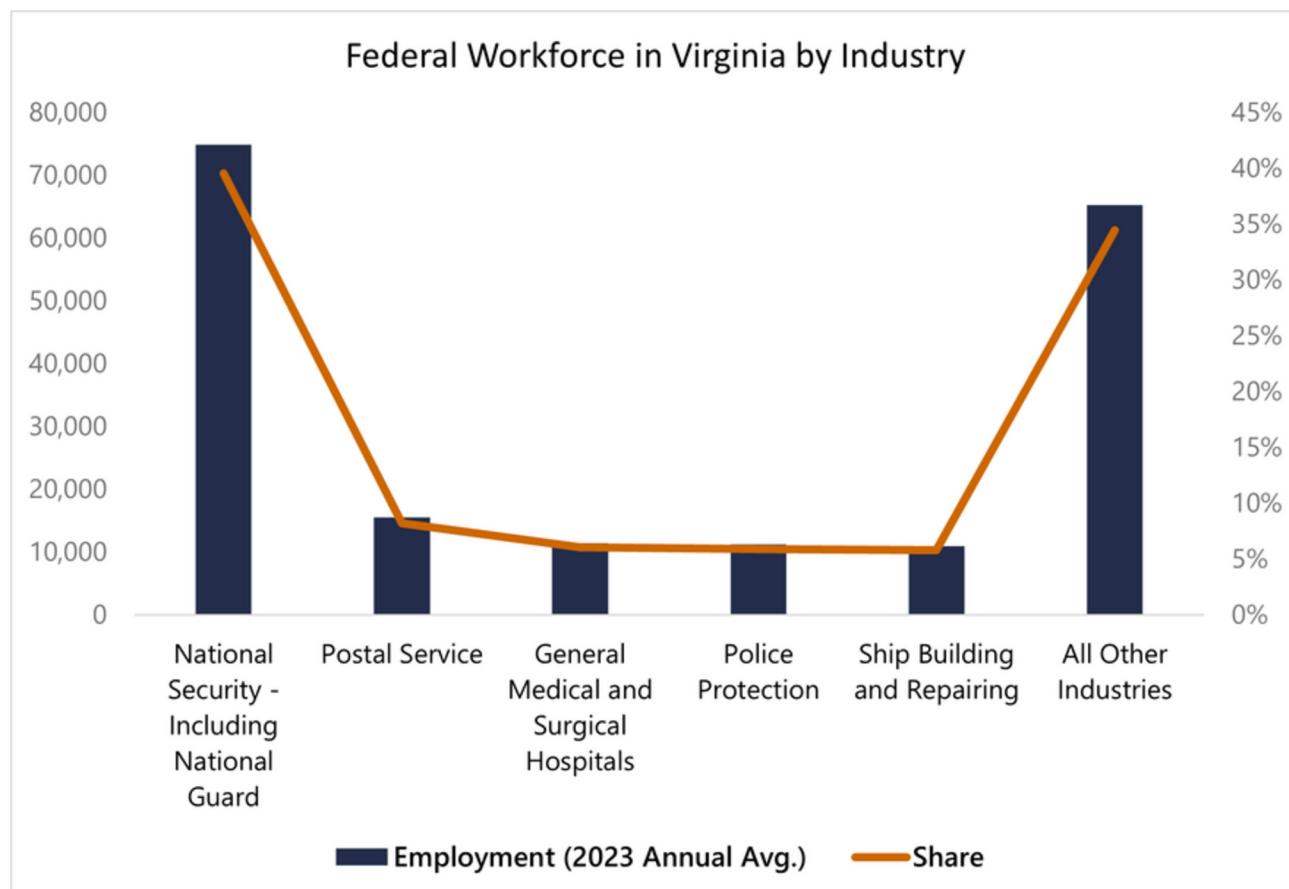
smaller cities such as Charlottesville, Roanoke, and Winchester also exceed the national average of 3.2%. Notably, 77 of the state's 133 counties and cities now report a higher share of federal workers than the national average, a significant increase from 63 in 2013. This trend is partly driven by the rise of remote and hybrid work arrangements.

77 of
VA's 133
localities are above
nat'l average in
federal employment

Share of Full-Time Civilian Workers Employed by the Federal Government



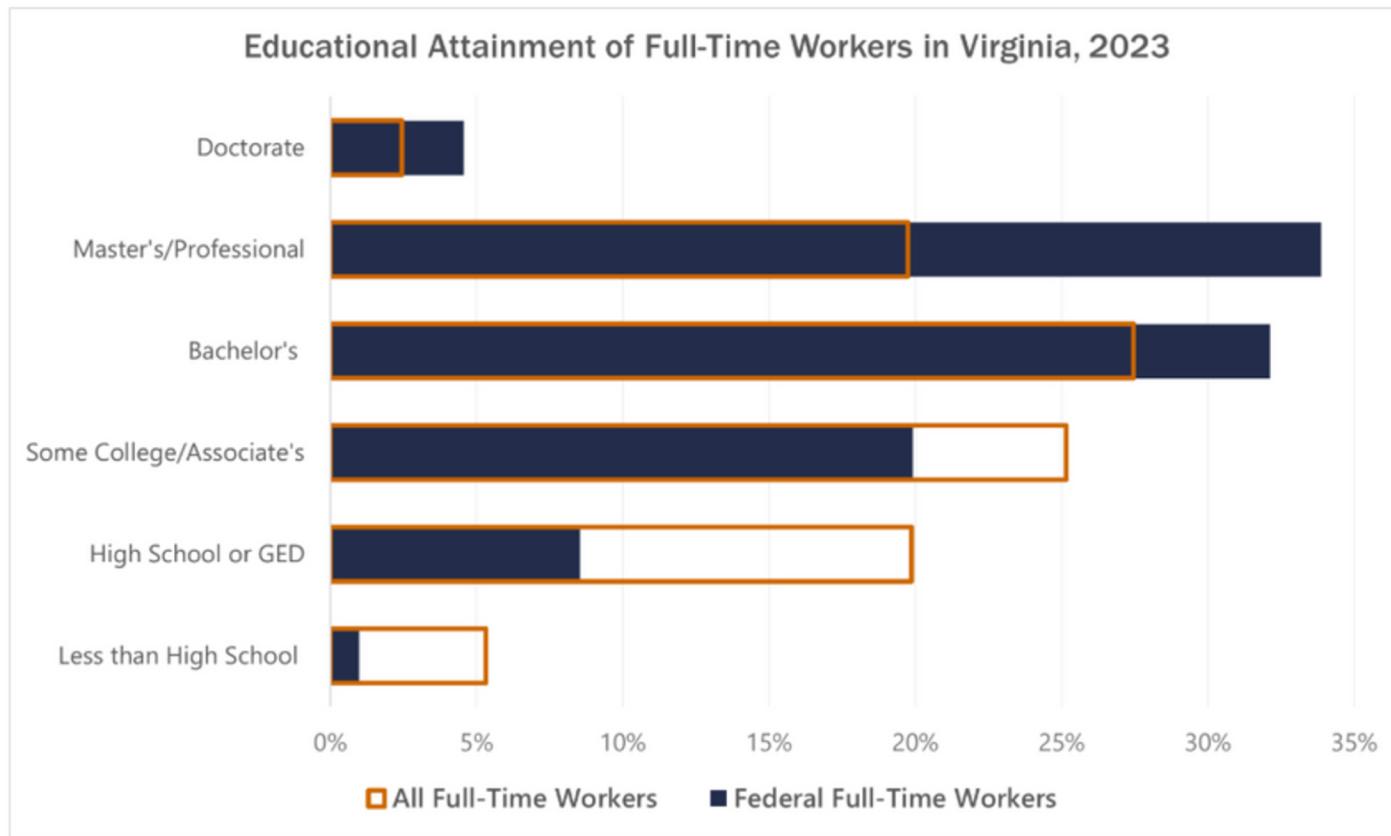
Additionally, Office of Personnel (OPM) data from September 2024 underscores that Virginia's civilian federal workforce is heavily concentrated in agencies related to national security. The Department of the Navy, Department of Defense, Department of the Army, and other defense-focused entities collectively account for the largest share of federal employees in the Commonwealth, reflecting Virginia's prominent role in supporting national defense operations and military infrastructure.



National security represents a particularly large and critical sector within Virginia's federal workforce; according to the BLS – QCEW data, nearly 40% of federal civilian jobs in Virginia are concentrated in industries related to national security. This high proportion reflects both the strategic importance of the state (particularly Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads) and the specialized nature of many national security roles. The concentration of jobs in national security not only drives economic growth in these areas but also emphasizes the importance of maintaining robust, up-to-date data on federal employment trends in national defense and other top industries.

Economic Impact

The economic impact of federal employment is significant for Virginia. While federal civilian employees constitute just 10% of Virginia's workforce – the second-highest share among states after Maryland – their median income in 2023 was \$117,740, nearly twice that of private-sector workers in the Commonwealth. This wage gap (which is the largest of any state) has contributed to Northern Virginia having the three counties (or equivalents) with the highest median family incomes in the U.S.



In addition, the high level of educational attainment among federal employees further reinforces their earning potential and job mobility. Seventy-one percent hold at least a bachelor's degree, compared to less than half of all working Virginians. Despite making up 10% of the state's workforce, they represent 18% of Virginians with a graduate degree and 20% of those with a PhD.

Data Sources & Key Issues

Various datasets provide complementary insights into the composition of the federal workforce. Active-duty military are often measured separately from civilian federal employment due to differences in roles, reporting standards, and operational classifications, which further underscores the need to integrate multiple data sources for a comprehensive analysis.

The U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 2023 5-Year Data provides self-reported information on federal workers residing in Virginia. One ACS table captures a more comprehensive number of federal employees living in Virginia – including both active-duty military and civilian workers – with a total of 475,713 individuals reported, 82,825 of whom report as working remotely.

Another ACS table focuses exclusively on federal civilian employees living in Virginia and reports a figure of 321,516. Complementing these figures, Department of Defense (DOD) data as of June 2024 reports 121,687 active-duty military personnel and approximately 102,000 civilian employees assigned to military functions. The Bureau of Labor Statistics' Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (BLS – QCEW) for 2023 records 189,000 federal civilian employees working in state establishments, while the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) data from September 2024 indicates 147,538 federal jobs in Virginia, including 11,809 held by employees with less than one year of service – a notable figure due to the administration's recent plan to eliminate probationary federal employees.

Comparison of Federal Employee Datasets

Data Source	Reporting Year	Key Metrics
ACS 5-Year (Table S2409)	2023	Federal Civilian Employees: 321,516
ACS 5-Year (Table B08128)	2023	Total Federal Workers (including active-duty military): 475,713 (with 82,825 remote workers)
DOD	06.2024	Active-Duty Military: 121,687 Civilian DOD Employees: ~102,000
BLS – QCEW	2023	Federal Civilian Employees (in-state establishments): 189,000
OPM	09.2024	Federal Jobs in VA: 147,538 Employees with <1 year of service: 11,809
BEA	2022	Federal Civilian Employees: 206,269 Active-Duty Military: 119,212

Note: Further details on coverage, methodology, and exclusions for each dataset can be found in the appendices.

Federal Civilian Commuting Patterns (ACS PUMS, 2023)

Work State	Total Commuters from Virginia
District of Columbia (DC)	60,847
Maryland (MD)	10,029
West Virginia (WV)	655
North Carolina (NC)	511
Tennessee (TN)	289
Kentucky (KY)	121
Non-Specified State (N/A)	56,171

Commuting patterns offer unique insights into the spatial distribution and economic impact of Virginia's federal workforce. Data derived from the ACS Public Use Microdata Sample reveals that a significant number of federal civilian employees commute daily to key employment hubs outside of the Commonwealth: over 60,000 workers travel from Virginia to Washington, D.C., and more than 10,000 commute from Virginia to Maryland. These commuting flows highlight the interconnectedness of regional economies and the importance of remote workers in the federal workforce. Moreover, the rise of remote and hybrid work arrangements is beginning to alter traditional work and commuting patterns, underscoring the need for ongoing adjustments in data collection, analysis, and policy.

Future Considerations

Looking ahead, several critical areas warrant deeper exploration. Future analyses will expand economic impact assessments to include not only contributions to Virginia's overall economic vitality but also advanced scenarios detailing potential job and revenue losses in the event of federal downsizing or shifts in spending. Additionally, evaluating comprehensive data on federal contractors is essential to fully understand the broader federal workforce and its influence on the state's labor market. As remote work continues to redefine traditional commuting patterns and reshape workforce distributions, it will be crucial to refine data collection methods to accurately capture these evolving trends. Finally, given that nearly 40% of federal civilian positions in Virginia are linked to national security, continuous monitoring of employment trends in this sector remains imperative for assessing both economic and strategic impacts.

Contact

For further information or questions contact:

João Ferreira
 E joao.ferreira@virginia.edu
 P 717.827.6402

Matt Scheffel
 E matt.scheffel@virginia.edu
 P 443.510.0504

For media inquiries contact:

Alexandra Rebhorn
 E arebhorn@virginia.edu
 P 434.243.6073



Appendix A: Detailed Data Source Explanations

American Community Survey (ACS) – 2023 5-Year Data

The ACS data is collected from households across the United States and is based on self-reported information from Virginia residents who identify as federal government employees. Two main tables used in this analysis include:

- **Table S2409:** Captures the class of worker by sex for the full-time, year-round civilian employed population aged 16 and over.
- Indicates 321,516 federal civilian employees residing in Virginia.
- **Table B08128:** Details the means of transportation to work for federal government workers, including both civilian and armed forces members.
- Indicates 475,713 total federal employees.
- Indicates that 82,825 of these employees are remote workers.

Department of Defense (DOD) Data (June 2024)

The DOD data focuses on personnel assigned to duty locations within Virginia and distinguishes between different categories of employees:

- **Active-Duty Military:** Defined as individuals on full-time duty, including those in training and annual exercises, numbering 121,687 in Virginia.
- **Civilian DOD Employees:** Approximately 102,000 civilian personnel support military functions.
- Additionally, the data outlines distinctions such as direct hire civilians (employees hired directly by a DOD agency) and indirect hire civilians (foreign nationals assigned via contracts or agreements with foreign governments). Other DOD organizations, like the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and various specialized agencies, are also considered in the broader context of federal employment, though some agencies such as the Defense Intelligence Agency, National Imagery and Mapping Agency, and National Security Agency are noted as not reporting current data.

Bureau of Labor Statistics – Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (BLS – QCEW 2023)

The QCEW data is derived from quarterly contribution reports filed by nearly every employer in the United States, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. This data source counts filled jobs based on establishment-level reporting and includes:

- **Federal Civilian Employees in Virginia:** Reported at 189,000 across federal establishments.
- The QCEW figures capture residents, in-commuters, and remote workers, but notably exclude active-duty military. The data is also disaggregated by industry and geography, revealing that nearly 40% of these federal positions are in national security, with the highest concentrations found in Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads.
- QCEW data was used to produce the share of federal employees by industry in this document. ACS microdata also provides a breakdown of federal employees by industry. The industry distribution from ACS mirrors that of the QCEW dataset, though the overall numbers tend to be higher due to the broader capture of employment activity through self-reported responses.

Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Data (September 2024)

OPM data is based on the official worksite locations of federal civilian employees as of September 2024. This dataset excludes several agencies, such as the U.S. Postal Service, DEA, FBI, and most of the legislative and judicial branches. Key highlights include:

- **Total Federal Jobs in Virginia:** 147,538
- **Employees with Less Than One Year of Service:** 11,809
- The OPM figures focus on the number of on-board federal civilian employees and are used to assess workforce stability and recent hiring trends, particularly in light of proposed policy changes regarding probationary employees.

Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) Data – 2022

The BEA provided data that included a broader scope of federal employment, such as congressional staff and U.S. Postal Service employees. Although this series has been discontinued, the BEA data remains useful for historical comparison and understanding trends over time. In 2022, BEA recorded:

- **Federal Civilian Employees:** 206,269
- **Active-Duty Military Personnel:** 119,212

Appendix B: Methodological Considerations & Detailed Definitions

ACS Methodology and Definitions:

The ACS data is collected from households, where an individual is considered a resident if they have been—or will be—staying at an address for more than two months during the year. Each housing unit is interviewed only once, with a randomly selected sample of roughly 3.5 million addresses chosen annually to ensure representation of the U.S. population. The survey encompasses all residential addresses, including owner-occupied and vacation homes, as well as state prisons, local jails, institutional halfway houses, military on-post barracks, and correctional institutions. All individuals living within a housing unit are grouped as one household. The ACS consists of two distinct samples: one covering housing unit addresses and another for residents of group quarters facilities. These samples are drawn from the Census Bureau's Master Address File (MAF), with independent housing unit addresses selected from each of the 3,143 counties and county equivalents in the United States, including the District of Columbia. The data is collected annually, and responses are aggregated into key tables such as S2409 and B08128, which provide insights into employment type and commuting patterns.



DOD Employment Definitions:

For DOD data, active-duty military personnel are those serving full-time, including those in training or on annual exercises. The dataset further distinguishes between:

- **Direct Hire Civilians:** Employees hired directly by a DOD agency, including U.S. citizens and, in some cases, foreign nationals.
- **Indirect Hire Civilians:** Foreign nationals or others employed through contracts or agreements with foreign governments, assigned to support U.S. forces.

This differentiation helps clarify the overall composition of the military workforce in Virginia.

BLS – QCEW Limitations and Data Coverage:

The QCEW data is based on establishment reports and counts only filled jobs. This means that a multi-job holder might be counted more than once, and certain categories of workers—such as self-employed individuals, many agricultural workers, and most domestic or student workers—are excluded from the count. Additionally, active-duty military personnel are not included in the QCEW figures, which focus solely on federal civilian employment within state-based establishments.

OPM Data Considerations:

OPM figures reflect the number of federal civilian employees at their official worksite locations as of March 2024. The data excludes a number of agencies and sensitive occupations. For example, OPM does not include the U.S. Postal Service, DEA, FBI, and most legislative or judicial branch employees. Moreover, sensitive occupations—such as various law enforcement and intelligence roles (detailed through occupation codes like 0007, 0082–0084, 0132–0134, and others)—are withheld to protect personnel security. These exclusions are documented in OPM's data release policy and are crucial for understanding the scope and limitations of the data.