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Most Frequently Asked Questions about the Latino Population of Massachusetts

Daniel W. Vasquez
University of Massachusetts Boston

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The Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy

Most Frequently Asked Questions about the Latino Population of Massachusetts

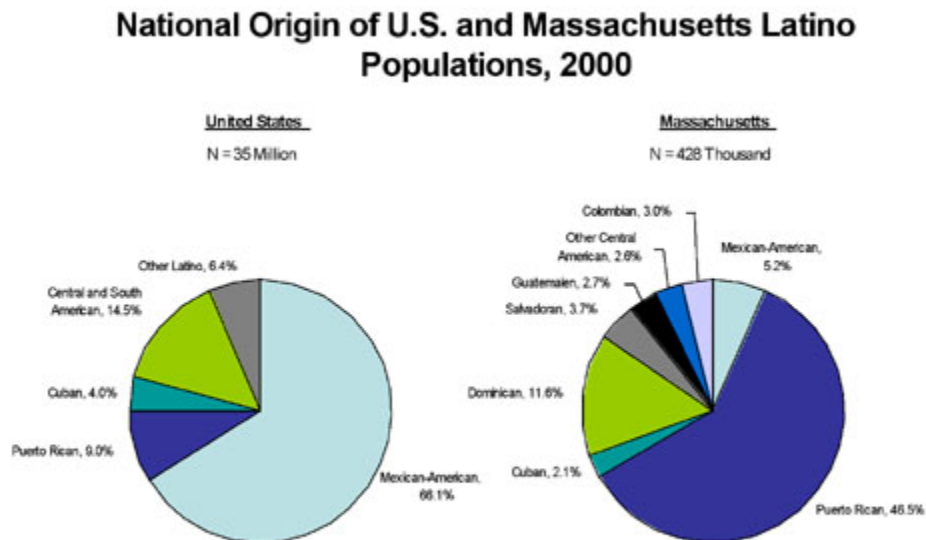
Daniel W. Vasquez

Background and Population

Who makes up the Massachusetts Latino population?

Latinos are an ethnically and racially diverse population according to 2000 census data. In Massachusetts, the Latino population is composed mainly of the following groups: Puerto Rican, 46.5%; "Other Latino," 19.1%; Dominican, 11.6%; and Mexican, 5.2%. The Latino population on the U.S. mainland is composed of the following groups: Mexican American, 66.1%; Puerto Rican, 9.0%; Cuban, 4.0%; Central and South American, 14.5%; and "Other Latino," 6.4% (US Census Bureau, 2000a) (see figure 1).

Figure 1. National Origin of U.S. and Massachusetts Latino Populations



How large is the Massachusetts Latino population?

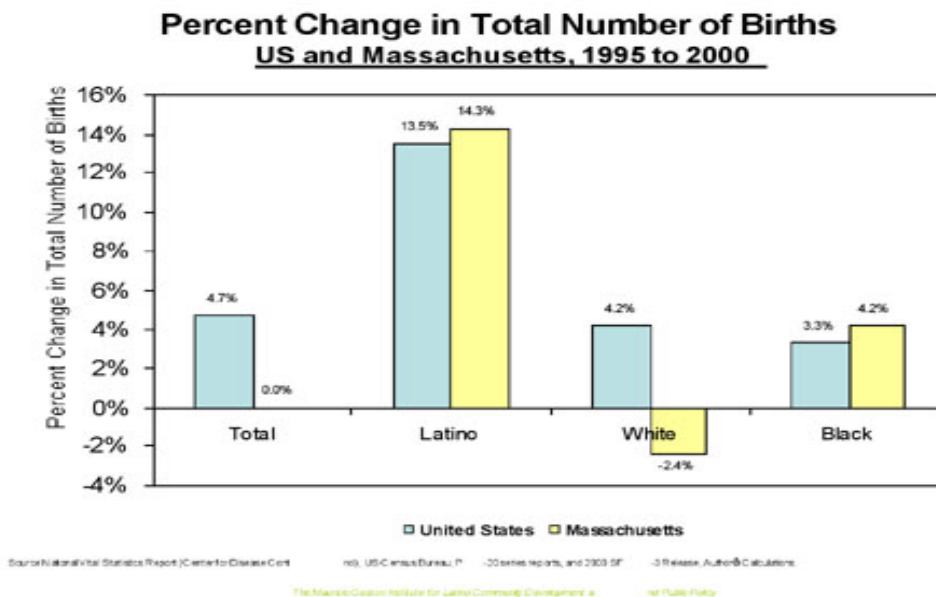
According to the 2000 census, Latinos make up about 6.8% of the total population of Massachusetts, and number 428,000. In comparison, whites and blacks are about 82% and 5% of the Massachusetts population, respectively. Asians make up 3.7% of the Massachusetts population. From 1990 to 2000, the Latino population of Massachusetts grew by 49.1% (141,180).

In 2000, the Latino population of the United States totaled 35.3 million, to make up about 13% of the country's total population. Latinos are now the largest minority group in the country. From 1990 to 2000, the Latino population of the United States increased by 60%, from 22.3 million to 35.3 million. Whites and blacks make up about 69% and 13% of the total population, respectively. Asians make up 3.6% of the total U.S. population (US Census Bureau, 2000a).

What accounts for the rapid growth of the Latino population?

The growth in the Latino population of Massachusetts is largely attributable to both a surge in total births and a rise in the level of immigration since 1991. In 2000 Latina women in Massachusetts gave birth to 9,268 children compared with 68,571 for white women and 8,101 for African-American women (Centers for Disease Control, 2001). This figure for Latinas represents a 14.3% increase, or 1,159 births, from the 1995 level of 8,109 births. Births among black women increased 4.2%, with only 323 more births than the 1995 level of 7,778. Among white women there was a 2.4% decline in births from the 1995 level of 70,242 births.

Figure 2.



Source: Centers for Disease Control, National Vital Statistics Report; US Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P-20-499, (1995), Current Population Reports, P-20-543RV. (2000), Washington, DC; and US Census Bureau, 2000 SF-3 Release, Author's Calculations.

Data from the 1995 and 2000 Current Population Reports reveal that, nationally, Latinas had the highest percentage increase in births, 13.5%, (96, 011 more births in 2000 than their 1995 level of 709,767), compared with 4.2% for white women (130,292 more in 2000 than the 3,072,640 recorded in 1995), and 3.3% for black women (20,057 more in 2000 than 599,913 in 1995) (US Census Bureau, 1995: 2000b) (see figure 2).

In addition, the immigration rate for Latinos in Massachusetts was also higher than that of other groups between 1991 and 1998, with an estimated average of 57 immigrants for every thousand Latino persons per year, compared with 27 immigrants per thousand persons (INS, 2003).

What is the age breakdown of the Latino population?

Overall, Latinos in Massachusetts are much younger than non-Latinos, and a large proportion of them are children. In 2000, more than one-third (36.2%) of Latinos were younger than 18 years old, compared with more than one in ten (15%) whites and slightly less than one-third (31.4%) of blacks. In contrast, relatively few Latinos were age 65 and older (3%) compared with both whites (15.0%), and blacks (6.8%). (US Census Bureau, 2000a)

What percentage of Latinos in Massachusetts are immigrants and citizens?

The majority of Massachusetts Latinos were born in the U.S. or have U.S. citizenship. Over two-thirds (68.8%) of Massachusetts Latinos are native-born, according to 2000 census data, while less than one-third (31.1%) are foreign-born. Of the total native-born Latinos in Massachusetts (294,179), over one-third (100,060) were born on the island of Puerto Rico. The rest (194,119) were born either in another state or outside the mainland US, for example in other US island territories or born abroad to American parents. Furthermore, 77% of Massachusetts Latinos identified themselves as U.S. citizens in 2000 (US Census Bureau, 2000a).

Do most Latinos in Massachusetts who speak Spanish also speak English?

The vast majority of Massachusetts Latinos who speak Spanish are also proficient in English. According to 2000 census data, 92.2% of the 313,383 Latinos five years old and over who spoke Spanish at home also spoke English. In addition, over three-fourths (75.9%) of Spanish-speakers said they spoke English "very well" or "well" (US Census Bureau, 2000a).

Education, Work, and Economic Well-being

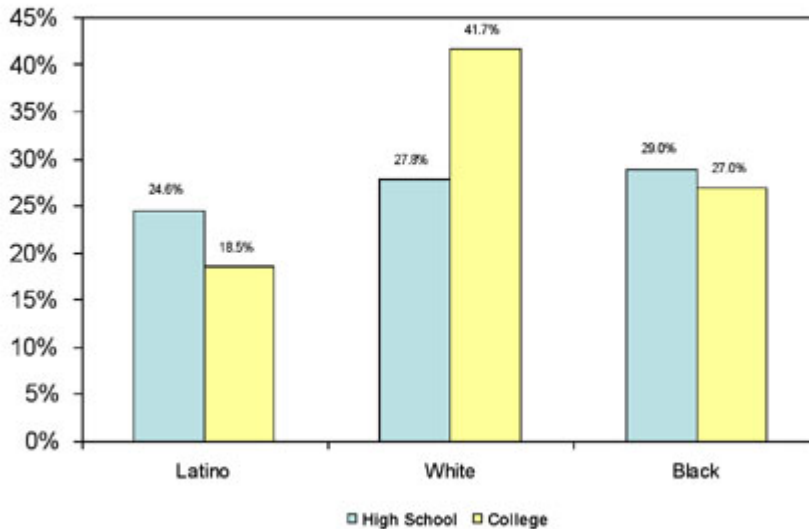
What percentage of Latinos are high school and college graduates?

There is a much smaller percentage of high school and college graduates among Latinos than among either whites or blacks. In 2000, one in four (24.6%) Latinos 25 years old and over had graduated from high school and even fewer (18.5%) had

graduated from college. In contrast, more than one in four (27.8%) whites and almost one in three (29%) blacks 25 years old and over had completed high school, and 41.7% of whites and 27% of blacks had completed college in 2000 (US Census Bureau, 2000a) (see figure 3).

Figure 3

Massachusetts High School and College Completion by Race, 2000



Source: US Census Bureau, Long-Form Data, SF-3 Release

What is the rate of employment among Latinos?

A high proportion of Massachusetts Latinos are participating in the labor force. In 2000, 52.3% of the Latino population 16 years old and over (150,000 Latinos), were employed, which was approaching the figure for whites (64%), and only slightly lower than the level for blacks (56.2%). Despite the fact that a comparable percentage of Latinos, whites, and blacks were employed in 2000, the unemployment rate for Latinos and blacks was 6%, compared with 2.6% for whites (US Census Bureau, 2000a).

What are the income levels for Latino families?

The median family income of Latinos in Massachusetts remains well below that of white and black families. According to 2000 census data, the real median family income for Latino families was \$27,885, compared with \$65,327 for white non-Latino families and \$38,565 for black families (US Census Bureau, 2000a).

What kind of impact does the Latino population have on the Massachusetts economy?

Latinos are making significant contributions to the overall Massachusetts economy. The number of Latino-owned businesses in Massachusetts rose dramatically from 1992 to 1997. In 1997, roughly 13,000 firms were owned by Latinos, an increase of 88% since the last U.S. census business survey in 1992; these firms generated over \$1.6 billion in gross receipts in 1997, compared with \$508 million in 1992 (1997 Economic Census). Furthermore, the buying power of the total Latino population in Massachusetts is projected to be \$8.8 million in 2005, which would represent an increase of 338% since 1990 (Selig Center, 2002).

What is the incidence of poverty among Latino families in Massachusetts?

Poverty rates for Latino families, working Latino families, and Latino children in Massachusetts are disproportionately high. In 2000, more than one-fourth of Latino families lived in poverty (28.5%), while the poverty rate was 4.6% for white non-Latino families and 18.3% for black families. Moreover, at the individual level, 2000 census data indicate that poverty is three to four times more common among Latinos than among non-Latino whites. While people of Latino origin represented about 6.3% of the Massachusetts population, they constituted nearly 20% of all people living in poverty. Finally, more than one-third (38.6%) of Latino children under five years of age were poor in 2000, compared with 8.1% of non-Latino white children and 30.2% of black children (US Census Bureau, 2000a).

Family Life

What is the make up of most Latino households?

The largest segment of Latino households in Massachusetts is made up of married-couple families, but female-headed families are a significant proportion of the total. In 2000, more than one-third (36.3%) of Latino households were married-couple families; however, slightly more than a fourth (26.6%) of Latino households were female-headed. In comparison, 51.3% of white households in Massachusetts were married-couple family households in 2000, and 9.6% were female-headed family households (US Census Bureau, 2000a).

Where do most Latinos in Massachusetts live?

The majority of the Latino population in Massachusetts live in five key places (Torres and Chavez, 1998): Boston, which has a Latino population of 85,089 that accounts for 20% of the total Massachusetts Latino population; Lawrence, 43,019 (10%); Springfield, 41,343 (9.6%); Worcester, 26,155 (6.1%); and Chelsea, 16,984 (4%). However, cities and towns that have historically had much smaller Latino populations also experienced significant growth during the last decade. Examples are Chicopee and Methuen, where Latinos experienced the largest gains in population among all ethnic and racial groups,

increasing by 133% and 103%, respectively. Latinos now make up 8.8 % of the population of Chicopee and almost 10% (9. 6%) of the population of Methuen, representing gains of 5 and 4.5 percentage points, respectively, since 1990 (Vasquez, 2003).

Are Latinos primarily homeowners or renters?

Most Latinos in Massachusetts are renters. Homeownership rates overall are relatively low among Latinos. Slightly more than one-fifth (21.8%) of Latinos were homeowners in 2000, which was much lower than the state average of 61%. By comparison, in 2000, 65.9% of whites and 31.3% of blacks were homeowners.

Daniel W. Vasquez is a Research Associate of the Gastón Institute.

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